Commentary
February 1999

Dying Made Easy
Paul R. McHugh

The Orthodox Moment
Jack Wertheimer

A Dissent on Isaiah Berlin
Norman Podhoretz

Fixing Social Security
Amity Shlaes

Racial Preferences: What We Now Know
Stephan Thernstrom & Abigail Thernstrom

Can We Prevent Genocide?
Gary Rosen

The Master of Drip
Michael J. Lewis

Books in Review
Christopher Caldwell • Aaron L. Friedberg • Peter Berkowitz
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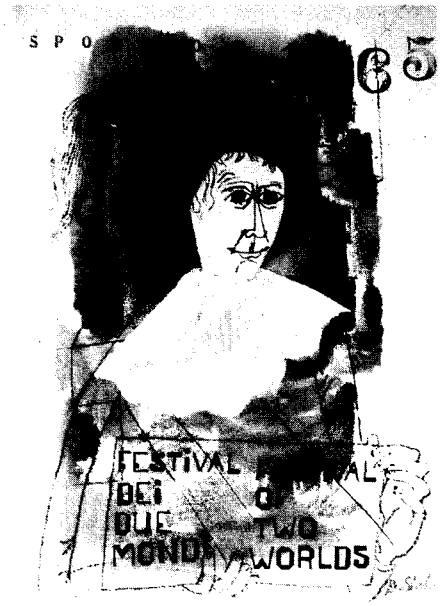

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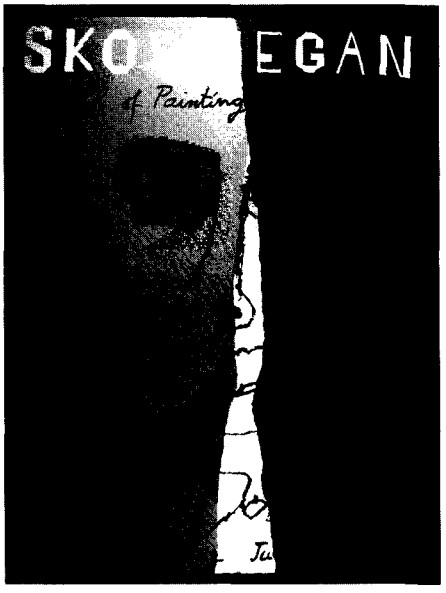

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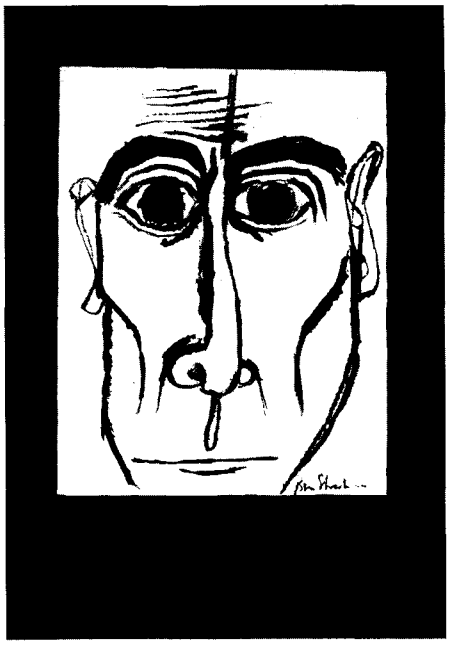

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Commentary
February 1999

Letters from Readers

Malthus vs. Faustus

To the Editor:

At the risk of identifying myself as a "neo-Faustian," allow me to offer a friendly critique of Peter W. Huber's thoughtful and elegant essay, "Reverend Malthus, Meet Doctor Faustus" [November 1998]. Mr. Huber is correct that increases in wealth and technology do not "guarantee felicity," as some might suggest. But the lack of such advances would condemn humanity to untold misery, and consign to oblivion the "natural" world that we seek to protect.

Consider that increased wealth has led not only to unprecedented improvements in health and longevity, it has also permitted us to meet our needs—physical and otherwise—without compromising the environmental values that most of us hold dear. While environmental activists condemn pesticides and other elements of modern agriculture, such advances are essential if we are to feed the world's growing population without encroaching on species' habitats and undeveloped lands. Were we to heed the activists' advice, and forgo the use of modern technology, either vast areas of habitat would be lost or the neo-Malthusian prophecy would come true as millions starved. Indeed, if farmers were forced to farm only with technologies that were available in the 1950's, they would need to clear ten million square miles of wildlife habitat simply to maintain current levels of production.

The advances we have achieved did not happen by accident; those who suggest otherwise truly are neo-Faustians. The role of institutional arrangements in overcoming scarcity and providing for greater environmental protection cannot be neglected. If we look around the world at environmental calamities and conservation successes, a picture emerges. The resources that are most thoroughly incorporated into the market system are those about which there is least concern; to cite only two examples: domesticated animals are abundant and temperate forests in the developed world are expanding. Moreover, market-driven advances in efficiency and technology are making it easier to do more with less—to provide for the wants and needs of an expanding population while slowing the ecological impact of human activities. Resource use per unit of output is on a downward curve throughout the market-oriented economies of the world. The neo-Malthusians are wrong in their predictions of environmental disaster because market institutions actually encourage the sustainable use of resources.

Those resources that are outside the market system, however—the remaining global commons and those areas managed through the political process—are in states of disrepair heading toward ruin. Tropical rainforests, coastal fisheries, airsheds, aquifers, and the like are seldom incorporated into the market system. Rarely do property rights extend to them and rarely is a common-law system of justice enforced to protect them. As a result, with no stewards to defend them, these resources have fared badly. The same can be said of politically "protected" lands, where mismanagement and ecological degradation are common. Had America relied exclusively on the political process to save our natural heritage, much of it, including the bison—the symbol of the Interior Department—would likely be extinct. As it happens, Yellowstone National Park had to be repopulated with bison from private herds.

There are no guarantees in life; and there is no guarantee that property-based institutions will protect each and every natural treasure.

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But this is no less true of alternative arrangements. Civilization inevitably intrudes on the natural world; all our cities were once forests, savannahs, or swamps. Our efforts to improve our lives, and our world, are not without ecological costs. But it is important to recognize that those institutions that best provide for human prosperity will best serve to protect the environment as well.

JONATHAN H. ADLER
Competitive Enterprise Institute
Washington, D.C.

TO THE EDITOR:

Peter W. Huber is right that the danger we face is neither the finiteness of the earth nor retribution from technological complexity, and that, however far we may carry it, technology does not guarantee happiness. He is also right that the natural world needs our solicitude and that life should be revered. But he gives too simple a response to those he calls "megatrend optimists" when he goes on to warn that "if humans multiply as the sands on the shore, the entire surface of the planet can end up like Manhattan without Central Park," and concludes that we might "destroy the book of life."

The smaller objection to Mr. Huber's assertion is his failure to mention the fact that in nearly half the world fertility is already below replacement level, and is falling rapidly in the other half. If people continue responding to circumstances as they have in the past, world population will begin declining some 50 years from now, with no end in sight. As Nicholas Eberstadt, Ben Wattenberg, and others have noted, the prospect is that, rather than cover the earth, the sands of humanity will erode like some of Long Island's expensive beaches.

More importantly, Mr. Huber fails to recognize that human evil and weakness of character are the main dangers in the world toward which growth and technological advance are leading. In the past, most people's energies were consumed in struggling against poverty, tyranny, and war. As these struggles become a small part of life—as they will within a century or two, and as they already are in North America and Western Europe—the "four horsemen" that will come to threaten the future are wealth, power, freedom, and knowledge. Our success in achieving these great values is what puts at risk our ability to lead good and happy lives. We threaten ourselves much more than we threaten the natural world.

As the task of clearing the underbrush that entangled us in the past ceases to occupy us, we will come face to face with the real challenges of making ourselves into decent people without the stern instruction provided by nature's adversity, and of deciding why we are here and what we should do with ourselves. We do not need a new formulation of the environmental problem; we need to look inward, and perhaps upward.

MAX SINGER
Jerusalem, Israel

TO THE EDITOR:

"Reverend Malthus, Meet Doctor Faustus" is a first-class piece of work, particularly in light of the UN's recent revision of world population figures, which reveals that we do not have a population explosion after all. But let us spare the scare quotes around "complexity theory," shall we?

The quotes occur in Peter W. Huber's description of Vice President Al Gore's views. The Vice President, as he explains, considers "pesticides, nukes, transgenic mice," and the like as

> inherently unstable, . . . like so many sandpiles. To the Vice President, sandpiles and the "complexity theory" that describes their behavior, explain a lot. . . . As in an egg timer, the grains of sand in a sandpile accumulate gen-

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tly, or seem to, until they reach an abrupt and perhaps catastrophic "cascade of change." This is the inevitable result, writes the Vice President, of the "dangerous bargains with the future we have struck in our vain attempt to escape the Malthusian dilemma."

The study of complexity is a new field, not well known or widely understood, which has led to its abuse by people like Gore in much the same way that relativity theory was once used to justify "moral relativism" and quantum mechanics invoked in connection with various New Age claptrap. Gore's "cascade of change," for instance, is in fact simply a shift from one state to another, not necessarily better or worse, and not catastrophic.

Complexity theory is in its infancy, and a lot has been claimed for it that cannot yet be demonstrated. But as now understood, it throws strong doubts on Marxism, Keynesianism, determinism—in fact, on any ideology based on scientific rationalism, including environmentalism as it is currently conceived. Complexity is one of those concepts like sociobiology and IQ that the Left is not going to be pleased with once it grasps its implications. Let us not throw it out quite yet.

J.R. DUNN
New Brunswick, New Jersey

TO THE EDITOR:

I would like to thank Peter W. Huber for such a thought-provoking article. I must, however, take exception to one of his propositions. Complexity is not our friend—it is a fierce antagonist that must be vigilantly battled as long as most of us are limited to three-digit IQ's. The doomsayers can, for the most part, be dismissed. But the lessons of Three Mile Island and the Kansas City Hyatt Regency cannot possibly be that those enterprises were insufficiently complex. To take one example: if the complexity management employed by the WordPerfect design group were applied to interlocking brake systems, it would be unwise for any of us to drive a car. Good design creates, at minimum, the *illusion* of simplicity, with complexity having already been mastered. Mr. Huber's point that the destruction of beauty is almost always a bad thing has both beauty and a compelling illusion of simplicity.

PETER KORMAN
Jenkintown, Pennsylvania

TO THE EDITOR:

Peter W. Huber concisely identifies the errors that beset both "neo-Faustians" and "neo-Malthusians": as to the former, their hubris blinds them into thinking that technology will make it possible to obtain "something for nothing," while the latter's equally wrongheaded fear that somehow, somewhere, everything will implode upon itself presumes that technology will ultimately be our nemesis. Both extremes fail to recognize what Mr. Huber reaffirms: technology is only a tool; it possesses no magical or creative qualities in and of itself, and is instead subject in the final analysis to whatever uses we choose to make of it. Of course, by opening to us vistas both horrific and beatific, technology has brought with it correspondingly pressing obligations to use its gifts wisely, obligations we have frequently shunted aside, or failed to recognize. Accordingly, Mr. Huber's vivid portrait of the "high-tech hell" that awaits us should we prove overly susceptible to the illusion that technology can solve all our ills serves as a valuable check to those who would view technology only through Dr. Pangloss's eyes.

If technology, despite its riches, is no panacea for all that ails us, there is still no denying that it has enabled us to come very far indeed. We can now perform marvelous feats that would have seemed magical, or miraculous, to those living only two or three generations ago. But we are neither magicians nor miracle workers; our knowledge, for all its

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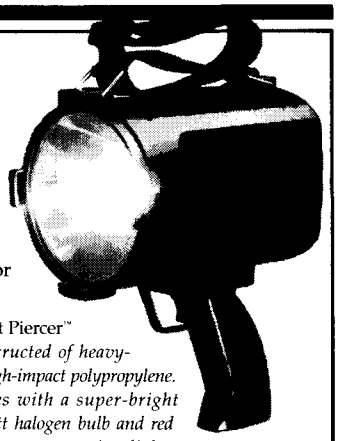

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seeming fullness, is incomplete.

None of this, of course, should come as a surprise, except maybe to the "neo-Faustians" Mr. Huber describes. Of more concern is the tendency of those with Malthusian leanings (among whom Mr. Huber quite properly locates Vice President Al Gore) to emphasize our inability to eliminate or even predict all the dangers and risks of technology, which then serves as a basis for imposing wide-ranging limitations, or even absolute prohibitions in some instances, upon the use of innocuous technological developments, let alone those that are unequivocally helpful. This is not to say that their position is wholly irrational; neo-Malthusians do not have bats in their belfry. Rather, their brains are haunted by gremlins, the mischievous pests of our technological age who surreptitiously loosen crucial bolts, fail to solder circuit boards, or short-out fuses at the most inopportune moments.

Doomsayers belong to an occasionally honorable guild with a longstanding pedigree, and it would be no exaggeration to acknowledge that many who foresaw dire consequences from this or that proposal or series of events were ultimately proven correct with the passage of years. Prophets without honor in their own time, it remained for the hindsight of history to recognize and extol their foresight. I believe Mr. Huber is ultimately correct to conclude, however, that the Vice President and similarly-minded critics will not be among those whom future historians hold up as models of prescience. To be sure, technology is no foolproof shield against chance and misfortune, and can indeed magnify the negative consequences of random events. Such, however, is the price of modern life; we can no more return to some imaginary pre-industrial era of peace and harmony than we can return to the womb.

In exposing the errors of neo-Malthusians who would, if they could, close what they see as Pandora's box, Mr. Huber has persuasively indicted those who, in spirit if not in deeds, stray perilously close to becoming modern-day Luddites.

TED BECKER
East Lansing, Michigan

PETER W. HUBER writes:

Jonathan H. Adler points out that technology and market forces continuously increase the amount of food, energy, and other goods per unit of natural resource used. This has been true, however, since the dawn of the Industrial Revolution. Unfortunately, environmental prospects are not determined by such measurements alone. To refute Malthus, one has to show that gains in the efficient use of natural resources are at least balancing, if not outpacing, the aggregate increase in human appetites.

The global population trends cited by Max Singer and J.R. Dunn address one component of that side of the equation. There is much evidence, as they both note, that global population is stabilizing. It seems, then, that producing food and other goods in abundance is an effective way to control human fecundity. This is indeed a heartening possibility, one that Malthus completely overlooked. But even a stable human population will not balance the Malthusian books if our appetites continue to grow. The current population of Florida is quite large enough to pave over the Everglades, if most people simply prefer shopping malls to Manatees. If that is where our tastes and appetites incline us, that is where the power of our technology will let us go.

But if technology is not bound to save the planet, technological complexity is certainly not bound to destroy it. J.R. Dunn is right that complexity theory comprises a real body of serious science. The quotation marks I put around the word were intended to convey only what he himself notes—that a vast body of pseudo-scientific claptrap travels under the same label. I doubt, however, that complexity theory will ever teach us anything profound about economics or politics that we cannot already read in Adam Smith or Friedrich Hayek.

I agree with Peter Korman that good design makes the most complex things appear simple. That is why we so often think of people (or Manatees) as far simpler and more reliable than machines, even though DNA-coded "wetware" remains immeasurably more complex than our hardware or software. But underlying complexity is not what makes things inherently safe or dangerous, either for people or for the environment. The reactor at Three Mile Island, for example, would have suffered no core damage at all if the operators in the control room had simply fallen asleep and allowed the automatic pumps to keep on pumping. And the skywalk at the Kansas City Hyatt would not have collapsed if it had been supported by a stronger bolt. Attributing these accidents to an excess of complexity is about as helpful as attributing them to an excess of entropy, relativity, or quantum uncertainty. I stand by the claim made in my essay: there is simply no demonstrable correlation between the rise of technological complexity and the decline of safety or environmental quality. The evidence at hand suggests just the opposite.

As Ted Becker writes, prophecy has an ancient and honorable lineage, and people ought not simply to give up on the business of trying to tell us where we seem to be headed. But when jeremiads or revelations are presented as "science," we must insist on intellectual rigor and empirical testing. Two centuries after Malthus, we can conclude with some certainty that his two-line mathematical model of agricultural productivity and human fecundity missed a lot that is both important and reassuring. Sticking a third factor labeled "technology" into the equation does not set everything right. Nor will a fourth factor, labeled "complexity," set it all wrong again. The evidence at hand—now backed up by the solid scientific core of complexity theory—strongly indicates that many systems are organized (i.e., not chaotic) but nevertheless inherently unpredictable, just as some problems in mathematics are known to be inherently intractable. William A. Sherden provides an accessible survey of this broad subject in his recent book, *The Fortune Sellers: The Big Business of Buying and Sell-*

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ing Predictions (Wiley 1998).

Still, as Mr. Adler suggests, there is reason to believe, though not yet scientific basis to conclude, that wealth may provide an ultimate, comfortable check on humanity's growth, not only because it lowers fecundity but because it satiates other human appetites, too. As secure, affluent people reach the private limits of their own consumption, they begin to put their wealth into other things, environmental conservation prominent among them. I think Max Singer is wrong if he is suggesting that "wealth, power, freedom, and knowledge" tend to make people worse custodians of their natural environment. Whatever good they may do for other aspects of human character, war, famine, and poverty do not make people better conservators.

But in advising us "to look inward, and perhaps upward," Mr. Singer is surely on the mark. The thirty-two-year-old Thomas Malthus said much the same thing. The anonymous pamphlet he dashed off in 1798 was written in reaction to the nonsense of French revolutionary theorists and British utopians, his own father among them, who advised mankind to dispense with the coercive institutions of family and private property. The "socialism" Malthus advocated in response was of the old-fashioned kind—morality, religion, and internalized standards of good behavior.

Turkey, Israel & the Middle East

TO THE EDITOR:

Thank you for the informative and well-written article, "The Real 'New Middle East'" [November 1998], in which Daniel Pipes describes the far-reaching post-cold-war blocs that have been developing in the region. However, I question the strength of his assertion that the political forces and tactical advantages that created these blocs and continue to bind them together "can override even such powerful factors as shared religion or ideology."

As Mr. Pipes points out, Turkey and Israel are the core of one bloc, while the core of the other is Syria and Iran. He contends that the enemies of a nation within one of these blocs will often align with the other bloc, resulting in unconventional alliances and practical cooperation between states that otherwise would not cooperate. But existing arrangements are nothing more than political conveniences which, like all other political conveniences, may be sacrificed when a higher political necessity arises. Thus, while Jordan and the Kurds living in Iran and Iraq identify with the Turkey-Israel bloc, Jordanians and Kurds, as individuals, would hardly call themselves "friends of the Jews." Indeed, should Israel face a military crisis, it is more than likely that, with the possible exception of Turkey, other members of the bloc would either abstain from the conflict or enter it against Israel.

For proof of this, one need look no further than the Gulf war. Israel's threat to retaliate against Iraq's Scud-missile attacks placed the coalition that had been formed to oust Saddam from Kuwait, which included most Arab states in the region, in danger. The United States had to persuade Israel not to retaliate to prevent the coalition from breaking up and possibly even re-forming against Israel.

Even after the Gulf war, the broad Arab coalition against Israel has continued. In fact, nothing in the region seems to unite enemies as much as hatred of Israel or, as Arab commentators sometimes call it, "the small Jewish nation." This is the basis of the true alliance to which all other alliances are subservient. To think that this conflict, religious in origin and kept going by reli-

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gion, will be suppressed to preserve the political arrangement of the moment is to ignore history. Though I believe Mr. Pipes's assessment of the present political framework in the Middle East is accurate, his predictions about its stability and utility to the West, particularly in the face of rising religious tension in the area, may not hold true.

JASON K. BERGER
Flushing, New York

TO THE EDITOR:

As a long-time subscriber, I have been tempted many times to write a letter to the editor, but have never done so. After reading Daniel Pipes's article, however, I feel I must comment. First, let me say that I thought the article was superb. Few Americans realize the complexity of the situation in the Middle East. But as an American Jew, married for many years to a Turkish-Muslim woman, I believe I have some understanding of the area as well as a deep-felt love of the nation and peoples of Turkey.

As excellent as Mr. Pipes's article is, however, I think there are additional factors that should be considered, possibly in a follow-up article.

• The Greek-Russian-Armenian axis that has been solidified through the offices of the Orthodox church, which has a historic hatred of Turkey.

• Turkey's long history of friendship toward the Jews going back 500 years, about which the average American Jew knows almost nothing.

• The shabby treatment of Turkey by the last two U.S. administrations and the insulting rejection of Turkey's membership in the European Union.

I could easily list ten more items, but I am sure Mr. Pipes is well aware of all of them. We need to educate the American Jewish community about the value, both to the U.S. and Israel, of the continued good health of Turkey, a nation now surrounded by enemies.

ROBERT H. SCHWALBAUM
Honolulu, Hawaii

DANIEL PIPES writes:

Jason K. Berger misreads my article. In the sentence he focuses on, I say that "what is impressive . . . is the extent to which the logic of 'my enemy's enemy' can override even such powerful factors as shared religion or ideology." But I do not say that this approach is immutable or paramount, only that it often outweighs other considerations. I agree that it has limitations. In particular, as enemies change, so does the identity of their enemy's enemy. To be specific: Mr. Berger cites the Kurds and Israel. Today, they both have a common enemy in Saddam Hussein. But should he be ousted and the Kurds establish their own homeland, they might indeed turn against Israel.

One other point: I disagree with Mr. Berger's implication that the Arab-Israeli conflict is the be-all and end-all of Middle East politics; there are many other vectors in that complex region and some of them at times trump anti-Zionism. To miss this complexity is to view the region too narrowly and to deny Israel many diplomatic opportunities.

I am honored to have inspired Robert H. Schwalbaum's first communication to COMMENTARY and thank him for the kind words. Being in agreement with his points about Turkey and Israel, I might just note that I made many of them myself in an earlier article, "A New Axis: The Emerging Turkish-Israeli Entente" (*National Interest*, Winter 1997/98).

Chemical Weapons

TO THE EDITOR:

In "Making the World Safe for VX" [October 1998], Frank J. Gaffney, Jr. mischaracterizes the position of the Chemical Manufacturers Association (CMA) on the threat posed by economic espionage.

It is certainly true, as Mr. Gaffney points out, that CMA was one of the most outspoken proponents of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). Our support was based on the nearly twenty years of work that industry representatives put into the CWC, which produced, in part, the strong protections for proprietary information built into the CWC's reporting and inspection structure. Those protections were reinforced in the implementing legislation that President Clinton recently signed into law. International inspection teams under the CWC, for example, will not be able to inspect sales and other records containing confidential business information. CWC declarations will not be made public.

In contrast, CMA's 1997 report on economic espionage focused on the threat to commercial interests posed by the vast amount of information on the chemical industry that is widely available to the public, notably over the Internet. Without protections like those available under the CWC, competitors could piece together enough information to affect U.S. national and economic security.

The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, which is charged with implementing the CWC, has conducted many inspections at commercial facilities in other countries, but there has not been a single allegation that the CWC inspection process compromises proprietary information. This is testimony to the efficacy of the protective measures the industry helped negotiate.

Mr. Gaffney is wrong in his criticism of the CWC. The treaty is the international community's best tool for eradicating chemical weapons while at the same time protecting the commercial and competitive interests of the chemical industry.

FREDERICK L. WEBBER
Chemical Manufacturers Association
Arlington, Virginia

FRANK J. GAFFNEY, JR. writes:

Frederick L. Webber's letter is but the latest example of wishful thinking on the part of the Chemical Manufacturers Association about the nature of the chemical-warfare threat, the value of the Chemical Weapons Convention, and the degree to which proprietary information will be protected as the CWC is implemented.

In reality, the threat from chemical weapons is now virtually universal. This is thanks in no small measure to the proliferation of facilities that can produce fertilizers, pharmaceutical products, baby formula, plastics, and the like but that also have the capability to

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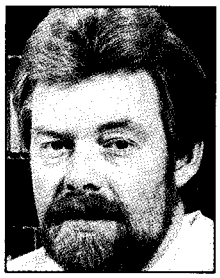

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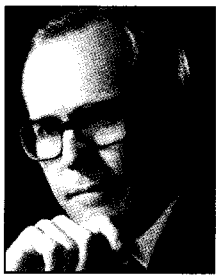

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manufacture toxic chemical agents for military purposes. Far from being, as Mr. Webber contends, "the international community's best tool for eradicating chemical weapons," the CWC will actually exacerbate such proliferation by promoting the transfer of dual-use technology, know-how, and equipment.

No less misleading is the credit Mr. Webber claims on behalf of the CMA for nearly twenty years of work that contributed to the "strong protections for proprietary information built into the CWC's reporting and inspection structure." The CMA did manage to exempt members of its trade association from some of the Convention's more onerous and intrusive inspections, but other American companies that were not involved or represented in the CWC negotiations have not been so lucky. And even some CMA companies have found their obligations under the Convention to be unjustifiably costly and burdensome.

There is a particular irony in the CMA's now praising the additional protections built into the legislation implementing the CWC. These protections were in fact the result of efforts by treaty opponents like Senators Jon Kyl (R-AZ) and Jesse Helms (R-NC), not of CWC supporters. Indeed, the latter have been sharply critical of these laudable initiatives.

Finally, Mr. Webber's contention that information available on the Internet poses a serious risk of economic espionage but information acquired via on-site inspections or through the burdensome reporting requirements demanded by an international bureaucracy does not is too silly to merit detailed comment. Suffice it to say that anyone who nurtures such illusions would be the last to know that the CWC inspection process has already compromised proprietary information.

Brahms

TO THE EDITOR:

I think that Terry Teachout is probably correct in claiming that Brahms was a trailblazer for the great 20th-century tonal composers ["Brahms the Radical," October 1998]. His unique viewpoint on Brahms, however, raises some questions in my mind. First, if Brahms was the "last figure to enter the canon of indisputably major 19th-century composers," where does this leave Anton Bruckner and Gustav Mahler? Second, should not Charles Ives be added to the group of 20th-century composers influenced by Brahms, even though, on occasion, he could be quite atonal? Third, why does Mr. Teachout call Brahms's Piano Concerto No. 1, unquestionably one of the great masterpieces of concerto literature, "immature"? If Mr. Teachout would clarify these points, it would help to round out his very insightful article.

HARRY I. WOLK
Urbandale, Iowa

TERRY TEACHOUT writes:

Harry I. Wolk is quite right about Charles Ives, some of whose early music is decidedly Brahmsian (Ives even borrowed the text of one of Brahms's greatest art songs, *Feldeinsamkeit*, for a setting of his own). He also makes a good point about Bruckner and Mahler, but what I meant, and failed to state clearly, was that Brahms was the last 19th-century composer to be generally accepted as the equal of such predecessors as Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert. Neither Mahler nor (especially) Bruckner has yet achieved that lofty status. As for the Piano Concerto No. 1, I have always found it to be what I think of as "young man's music"—grandiloquent, structurally shaky, and opaquely scored. I am by no means alone in this view, but most critics and listeners agree with Mr. Wolk, and perhaps some day I will come around to their way of thinking. The older I get, the more music I like.

China and the West

TO THE EDITOR:

I hope you will permit me, at this late date, to comment on David Gress's review of *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations* by David S. Landes [August 1998]. In the review, Mr. Gress declares, correctly, that the Chinese possessed gunpowder, printing (by moveable type), and paper long before any other people. He then observes, quite incorrectly, that "these existed in China for centuries without spurring economic progress."

On the contrary, the Jesuits who arrived in the late 16th and early 17th centuries judged China to be the most prosperous nation on the face of the earth, more advanced by far in the skills and arts of living than Europe. Yet those Jesuits saw the Ming Dynasty in its last stage of decay, only decades before it was overthrown by the Manchus.

The Qing (Manchu) empire (1795-1912), too, was in its day similarly advanced before it perished of the final decay that afflicted every imperial dynasty, its demise hastened by the impact of the West. The reigning emperor told an embassy from Britain in 1793 that China possessed within its borders all the goods that were useful to human beings—and he was not far off the mark. China even possessed opium, but that opium was too expensive for the commonality until the egalitarian British forced China to admit cheaper opium from India.

No, the chief characteristic that distinguished Europe from China and, for that matter, Japan, was its greatly superior skill at arms, though the Chinese were originally ahead even in weaponry, and its willingness, nay eagerness, to use force.

ROBERT ELEGANT
Todi, Italy

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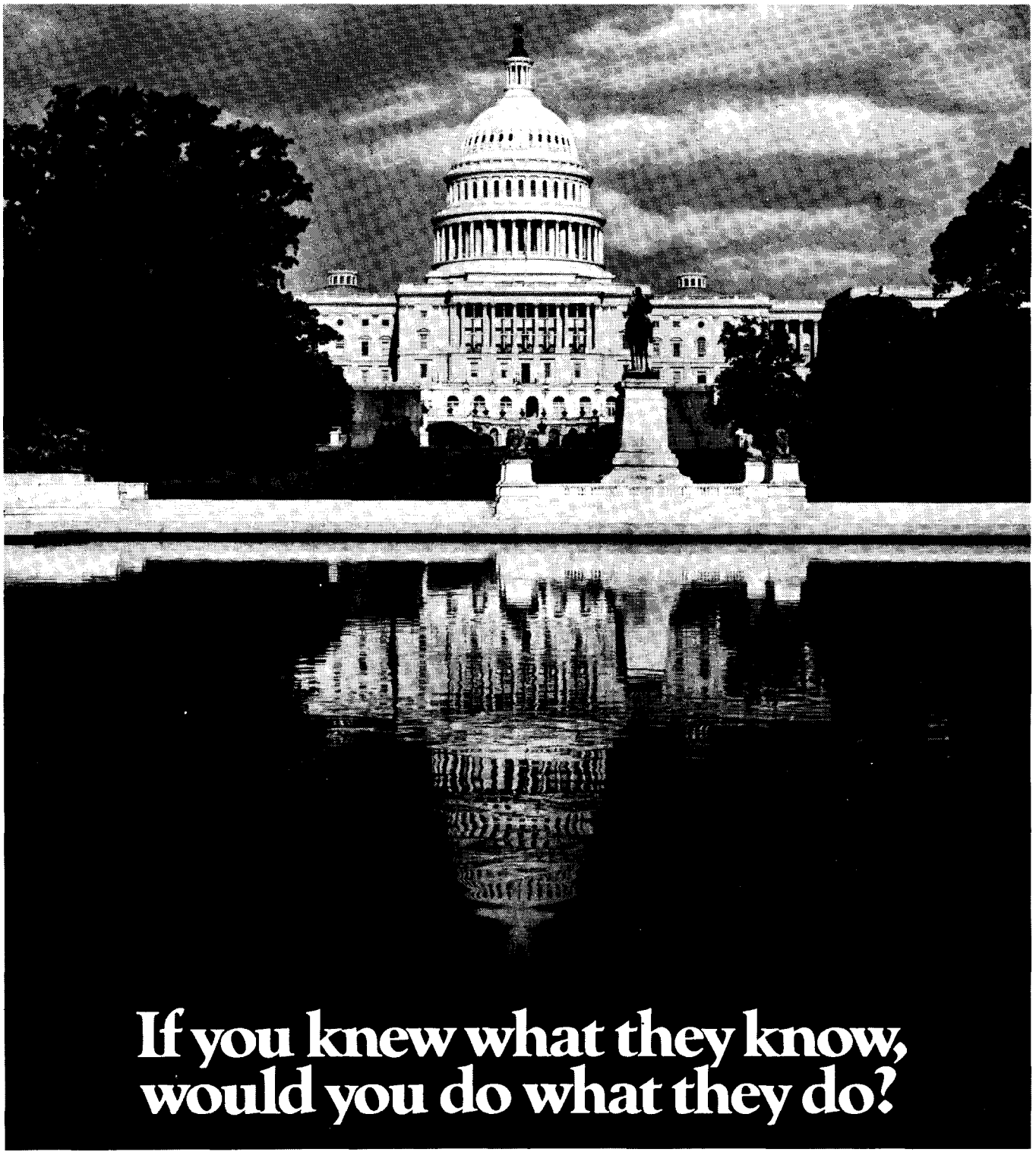

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Commentary
February 1999

Dying Made Easy

Paul R. McHugh

TWO FACTORS determine how people die: the diseases they have, and who they are. In any given case, these two factors vary in salience. With sudden, terminal diseases like massive heart attacks or apoplectic cerebral hemorrhages, the disease dominates, and mostly obliterates, personality. Then does the power of nature, the "great equalizer," render alike the death of rich and poor, wise and foolish, brave and timid.

But with slowly advancing disorders—cancer, liver failure, AIDS—who you are powerfully affects how you die. Temperament and character, apprehensions and commitments, resources and support, shape the response to symptoms. Indeed, from the point of view of society, the behavior of one patient suffering from an incurable disease can differ so radically from that of another suffering from the same disease as to influence our attitudes toward life and death themselves.

In medicine, these are commonplace ideas; the individuality of patients with similar diseases was emphasized as long ago as Hippocrates. But they have achieved a new resonance with the recent debates over euthanasia and assisted suicide, and with widespread popular concern over easing the final stages of life for the terminally ill.

PAUL R. MCHUGH, *here making his first appearance in* COMMENTARY, *is the Henry Phipps professor of psychiatry at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine and psychiatrist in chief at the Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore.*

Two cases in particular commend themselves to our attention. The first is that of Thomas Youk of Michigan, who in the fall of 1998 was killed by Dr. Jack Kevorkian. This act of euthanasia was recorded on videotape and, on Sunday, November 22, witnessed by over sixteen million people on the CBS news program, *60 Minutes*. The second case is that of Morris S. Schwartz, a former professor of sociology at Brandeis University and the eponymous subject of *Tuesdays with Morrie* by Mitch Albom,* a book that has been on the *New York Times* best-seller list, mostly in the number-one position, for over a year.

What connects the two cases is that both men were suffering from the same neurological disease: Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), commonly referred to as Lou Gehrig's disease after the great New York Yankee first baseman who died from it. And yet, though they had identical afflictions, the contrast in the final moments of their lives could not have been sharper. The first man's death was ghastly: Kevorkian prepared the site by persuading the patient's family to leave home for a few hours, and then, when he had him alone, killed him by intravenous injection of a poison to stop his heart. By contrast, Morris Schwartz, whose advance through the terminal stages of ALS is almost as well recorded as that of Thomas Youk, died naturally and in peace, surrounded by friends and family.

Each of these two deaths thus makes a cultural

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statement. Judging those statements, however, is not quite so straightforward an exercise as it might appear.

OTHER THAN how he died, we know very little about Thomas Youk. He was a Catholic; he restored and raced vintage cars; he was said to have led an active life. Members of his family, who spoke about him on *60 Minutes*, described him as a "fighter."

Youk had been suffering from ALS for two years. His family called Kevorkian because, they reported, he was "in terrible pain, had trouble breathing and swallowing, and was choking on his own saliva." On his first visit, Kevorkian performed the most cursory of medical examinations, confirming only that Youk showed severe paralysis of the limbs and had difficulty breathing and speaking. Concluding that he was "terrified of choking," Kevorkian had him sign a consent form for euthanasia, "to be administered by a competent medical professional in order to end with certainty my intolerable and hopelessly incurable suffering." Two nights later, he returned to do the job.

It was, of course, not his first killing. Over the last decade, Kevorkian has been actively soliciting people to enable him to "assist" them in committing suicide, going so far as to advertise his services in newspapers. By means of a device—his so-called Mercitron—capable of delivering intravenous poison when the patient presses an activating button, he has fostered the deaths of over 130 people. He defends his behavior as "symptom" relief—his treatments, he says, are not intended to kill but to relieve the patient's distress—although his favorite medication, potassium chloride, has no role in the relief of symptoms other than by stopping the heart. This justification has nevertheless satisfied three juries before whom he has been tried for murder.

When asked by a Michigan paper if Youk had had any last words, Kevorkian, the physician closest to him in his final days, replied, "I don't know. I never understood a thing he said." What he did know was that Youk and his family had reached their self-proclaimed limits in tolerating the symptoms of disease. And that, for his purposes, was enough. For what Kevorkian was seeking and had found in Youk was an individual who could be used to challenge the laws of Michigan against euthanasia as he had previously challenged the state law against assisted suicide. His true intent, in other words, had less to do with relieving the suffering of an individual than with making euthanasia, as he has put it, a "fundamental American right—part of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Youk was a means to that end.

If we know little about the man who agreed to become Kevorkian's "poster boy for euthanasia," as Mike Wallace referred to Thomas Youk on *60 Minutes*, we know a very great deal about Morris Schwartz. Not only was he a well-regarded sociologist with many publications to his name, but his dying and death were the subject of more than this one book, *Tuesdays with Morrie*. ABC-TV's news program *Nightline* had interviewed him three times over the two-year course of his illness, and television viewers had come to appreciate his lively and brave demeanor. It was, indeed, the first of these broadcasts on *Nightline* that impelled Mitch Albom, a sportswriter for the *Detroit Free Press* who had studied with Schwartz at Brandeis, to begin visiting his former teacher weekly at his home outside Boston. Not only did Albom go on to write a best-seller about that experience, but Schwartz's aphorisms on sickness and death have also been collected in another book, *Letting Go: Morrie's Reflections on Living While Dying*.

Tuesdays with Morrie is a small book—192 pages long. It begins by describing Morrie's life before his illness and the circumstances in which he and Mitch met. (Everyone goes by a nickname or a diminutive in this book—not only "Morrie" and "Mitch" but "Rob," "Gordie," "Charlie," even "Rabbi Al.") Then, in a series of fourteen chapters, we are given vignettes of the Tuesday visits. Through this record of the conversations between the two men, we become progressively enlightened as to Morrie's attitudes toward dying and death as well as toward such matters as the expenditure of emotion, forgiveness, family, and regret. The final chapter describes Morrie's death and funeral.

Although *Tuesdays with Morrie* is mainly a vehicle for Morrie to speak about his illness and himself, we also learn about Mitch and his family, and about Mitch's reactions to the progress of his friend's disease. The events of the sickroom and the way he and Morrie cope with them are graphically rendered, as are the suffering and death of an uncle of Mitch's from pancreatic cancer. (Mitch's younger brother, to whom the book is dedicated, has the same disease.) The net effect is to give us a picture of life in the round, and to bring home the blessed appropriateness of being able to die as we have lived—surrounded by friends, exchanging affectionate thoughts.

I WILL return in a moment to what, in Morrie's case, those thoughts are. But it may be useful first to say something about the illness to which Morris Schwartz and Thomas Youk responded in so divergent a manner.

ALS is a grim, incurable, progressive neurologi-

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cal disease characterized by a gradual degeneration of the nerves that activate the muscles of the body. Its first symptoms can appear anywhere—in the arms, the legs, or around the mouth and jaw. But eventually and gradually it afflicts the entire body with a total atrophy of the muscles, ending in complete paralysis. Death comes from the weakening of the respiratory action of the chest and diaphragm, making breathing ineffective; if the patient is not maintained on a respirator, he will slip into a coma and die.

Although ALS is an illness that no one would wish on another, it is not the worst illness from which to die. Unlike, say, pancreatic cancer (of the kind Mitch describes his uncle and brother as suffering from), ALS is relatively painless. It does produce much discomfort from coughing, and from the aching of limbs that cannot change their position, but these can be ameliorated by good nursing care. The end itself is quiet. The muscles of respiration fail very slowly, and the patient usually has no sense of smothering but rather is gradually narcotized from the accumulation of carbon dioxide. Death often comes at night; the patient may fall asleep in the evening with no obvious change in his condition, and then just fail to awaken.

Moreover, in contrast to other incurable diseases, ALS does not produce delusional depressions of the kind that can crush the spirit by triggering attitudes of self-blame, hopelessness, and a profound sense of the meaninglessness of all human action. These depressions, which derive from the brain disorders that can accompany AIDS and Huntington's or Parkinson's disease, are unresponsive to efforts at distraction. They represent a form of insanity that can provoke suicide and that demands psychopharmacologic attention.

This is hardly to say that patients with ALS are not often discouraged or greatly dismayed. Such symptoms are reported frequently in *Tuesdays with Morrie*, and the family of Thomas Youk also suggested that he was suffering from them. But moods of this nature differ in kind from delusional depression, and are more properly thought of as aspects of demoralization: emotional reactions, provoked by actual circumstances, that everyone has experienced in minor or major forms in life and that can be relieved by thoughtful psychological assistance, professional and amateur alike. Many patients with ALS can throw off their sad feelings for long periods of time, just as Morrie did—sometimes through their own efforts, usually with help from others who understand them and what they are undergoing.

Another vital characteristic of ALS is that its victims have no loss of cognitive power. Nothing in the disease prevents them from thinking and planning as before. Conceivably, this in itself can become a burden, since patients are alert to the relentless progress of their disease toward death. But in many cases, the retention of cognitive power offers a means of helping them. Morrie, for example, was promptly informed of his future when the diagnosis of ALS was made; although his intense awareness of his fate did bring on intermittent feelings of demoralization, his clarity of mind permitted him to take charge of his situation, put aside self-pity, and undertake activities that encouraged him and gave him purpose.

Patients with ALS can do valuable work. Mayor Fiorello La Guardia made Lou Gehrig an officer of the New York City Parole Board after the Yankees—true to type, even then—cut him off once he could no longer play. He worked effectively at that job for a year. Steven Hawking, the famous professor of astronomy at Cambridge University who suffers from a more slowly progressive form of ALS, continues to do cosmological research, write, and teach with the help of advanced electronic devices. Nelson Butters, one of the most talented and productive American neuropsychologists of recent decades, edited journals and supervised psychological research right up until the last weeks of his life.

An especially ironic example is offered by the case of Noel David Earley of Rhode Island, who in 1996 began to demand euthanasia for his advancing condition and found a health worker to provide a syringe with which he might commit suicide. The date on which Earley planned to kill himself, he announced, was December 4, 1996—a date still far enough in the future as to give him ample time to tell his story and protest the laws forbidding euthanasia. In the intervening months he testified before the state government and the Rhode Island Medical Society, and contacted the American Civil Liberties Union to gain its help in asserting his "right to die"; he was given plenty of airtime, and plenty of ink. But when December 4 finally came, Earley decided he had not adequately explained his position. He thereupon set a new date several weeks ahead. Friends now had to carry his shrunken and paralyzed body around his apartment and to interviews at which he continued his protest against the state of Rhode Island and its uncivilized laws.

Finally, after a second postponement of his announced self-murder, Earley unexpectedly died in his sleep. Friends said he would surely have killed

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himself eventually, and they themselves were surely prepared to fight for his "right" to do so. But many also conceded that he had been at his most cheerful when crusading against the laws that deprived him of this right; he was never so chipper as when fighting to die.

THE LESSON is simple. ALS is a bleak condition, but give a person who has it a reason to live, and he will keep going to the end, distressed intermittently by its burdens but aided by any sense of purpose and grateful for any help. And that, indeed, is where medicine enters the picture. Specialist physicians know the progress and succession of symptoms, and the treatments that can relieve them. Skilled nurses can administer daily care—delivery of medications, bathing and cleaning the body, managing the environment of the home or hospital room—in ways that mitigate both the symptoms of the disease and its psychological complications.

No such attendance followed poor Thomas Youk. Jack Kevorkian, it is important to note, was trained as a pathologist, and had no practical experience in caring for terminally ill patients before he embarked on his crusade to become their deliverer. He takes his moral authority, moreover, not from his role as a doctor but, as I have already suggested, from political ideology—and specifically from his understanding of the libertarian philosophies of John Stuart Mill, Thomas Jefferson, and John Locke. What more fundamental right, he asks, than the right to decide when to die? If, under the constraints of disease and suffering, "you don't have liberty and self-determination," he proclaimed on *60 Minutes*, "you got nothing."

All this, however, is a lie built on a terrible distortion. The distortion has to do with the way Kevorkian drags his ideological heroes—Locke, Jefferson, Mill, and the rest—into a realm in which their political categories do not apply. As hard as it may be to tell the difference between "true" and "alienated" desires when we are in full possession of our physical and mental faculties, it is a thousand times harder when outside forces overwhelm the self, rendering it vulnerable to unreflective impulses. Among the reasons patients with dire illnesses turn to physicians for help is that their capacities for thinking and planning have been compromised. The responsibility for drawing distinctions under these circumstances lies at the very heart of medical practice. It is the duty doctors owe their patients.

In any case—and here is the lie—the real philosophy espoused by Kevorkian is a doctrine not of *rights* but of *feelings*. For in dismissing the role of the physician as a provider of reasoned guidance, as one who helps a patient differentiate good from bad, right from wrong, responsible decisions from impulses, Kevorkian "privileges" instead the momentary inclinations of the patient, who is most often *in extremis*. Kevorkian himself never reviews a patient's full history; never considers the relief of symptoms, other than via death; never invokes contemporary medical knowledge concerning the management of a patient's disease; and never reflects on the patient's mental state or personal vulnerabilities. He also never considers how his own proposals and practices may influence a suggestible patient's decisions. The propositions advanced by unsettled and possibly unbalanced minds he absurdly equates with the thoughts of free and reflective citizens, and upon these unbalanced minds he then grandly confers their "rights."

What we are talking about, then, is a special kind of nihilism, and a special kind of atomism. In the Kevorkian world view, the patient is a solitary figure, related to nothing or no one beyond himself, with neither a past to honor nor a future to influence (a future, that is, distinct from his impending death). His desires, regardless of their sources and implications, regardless of how they might be affected by cool reflection or alleviating therapy, are the only factors that count. A man named Thomas Youk complains that he is tired of life under the conditions he faces; his family agrees; without studying the circumstances out of which these feelings were generated, and against which they might be evaluated, a man named Dr. Kevorkian kills him.

HOW HAVE we, as a culture, come to this pass? In a narrow sense, the question is easily answered. When we—doctors, family, and friends—endorse a patient's feelings of discouragement, treating them as the most pertinent fact about him and leaving him without suggestions or plans for acting purposefully during what remains of his life, then we open the door to Kevorkianism. But surely—the reader may protest—we do not all act so callously. Thank goodness, no one ever thought of abusing Morrie Schwartz the way Thomas Youk was abused; and that makes all the difference in the world. The culture may not yet be so lost.

But we cannot really leave it at that. For the fact is that, in its own determinedly upbeat way, *Tuesdays with Morrie* is a disheartening book. True, for people seeking commonsense instruction, it may serve—from its sales figures, it clearly does serve—a useful purpose, akin to the purpose served, for the beginnings of life, by Dr. Benjamin Spock's fa-

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mous book on baby and child care. Between them, Morrie and Mitch also offer lots of good advice of a more general nature. They tell us to accept with grace the loss of dignity that accompanies serious illness: the odors and minor ugliness of the sickroom. They tell us to take our friendships seriously, and to make efforts and sacrifices to preserve them. And the like.

But their limitations are evident, and in the end disqualifying. Like Dr. Spock, Morrie and Mitch are strong on the hows and debilitatingly weak on the whys. As a professor, Morrie comes from the "group-process" school of social psychology—a doctrine that promotes a kind of therapy based on the vigorous exchange of off-the-cuff personal interpretations and frank, uncensored opinions. He seems (again like Dr. Spock) most at home in the 1960's, a time when talk and self-display took on a life of their own and universities were transformed overnight from places where one learned what was known into places where the point was to *discuss* everything.

Discussion, indeed, is the keynote of *Tuesdays with Morrie*, if discussion is not too elevated a word for the psychobabble, mixed in equal parts of crude Marxism and empty hedonism, that fills its pages. Throughout, Morrie and Mitch talk about the defects of "our culture" (their term), deprecating it like a couple of old hippies. "We work too hard and are too ambitious," opines Morrie one Tuesday. Or, "Money is a substitute for love for most people." Or, "As I'm sitting here dying neither money nor power will give you the feeling you're looking for." Asked what might give you that feeling, he replies: "Devote yourself to creating something that gives you purpose and meaning." Such as? Morrie does not say, and Mitch never thinks to ask.

"Accept what you are able to do and what you are not able to do." "Learn to forgive yourself and others." Never "assume it's too late to get involved." How the agonizing choices life puts before us can be negotiated, and tragic errors avoided, on the basis of such empty maxims is never examined by Morrie or Mitch. Their vocabulary is heavy on words like love, openness, compromise, "feelings"; light on duty, responsibility, accountability.* What one especially misses in *Tuesdays with Morrie*, a book devoted to the subject of death, is any sense of awe in its presence.

The mystery of human existence—so poignantly felt by everyone at the great moments of birth, marriage, and death—is passed over by our two protagonists without so much as a murmur. At one point, Mitch asks Morrie his opinion of the biblical figure of Job, and of the God Who "made him suffer." Morrie responds: "I think, God overdid it." From a dying man who is himself showing considerable Job-like perseverance, this is a witty remark. Unfortunately, when it comes to interpreting life and death, neither here nor elsewhere does this highly educated man stop to ponder the great questions posed by Job, not least among them the question of whether there is anything beyond our selves that can judge us and our purposes, or imbue the choices we make with permanent significance.

"Naked I came from my mother's womb, naked I shall return. The Lord gave, the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." Between Job's dispassionate but sublimely *connected* thought and Morrie's anodyne one-liners stretches an unbridgeable spiritual chasm.

Does it matter? Morrie, after all, died the way he lived. He was jovial and spirited; he hung in there; he lives on in the minds of his friends. So what if he talked a fair amount of nonsense along the way?

The real question, though, is whether any lasting strength can be gained from an account like this one—strength that derives from knowing ourselves (as Morrie and Mitch do not) to be the legatees of inviolable traditions, cultural and professional alike, as well as members of a vast and enduring human community that stretches back into history and forward into the experience of those yet to come. Morrie's method of managing his own death is not to be disparaged. It worked for him, thanks to his innate pluck, and to the special arrangements available for his care. But how is that method, untied to principle, to tradition, or to any sense of larger human obligation, going to help those who lack his advantages: the weak as well as the strong, the lonely as well as the befriended, the tortured as well as the pain-free?

To the proponents of euthanasia and assisted suicide, the attitudes expressed in *Tuesdays with Morrie* offer, alas, no prescriptive resistance. They can be no more than a sweet interlude, a brief way station along the path paved by Dr. Kevorkian—and by all the kinder and gentler Kevorkians who are waiting a step or two behind. On that path, the signpost, brief and desolating, reads: You are alone.

* In writing this book about Lou Gehrig's disease, Mitch Albom, who has been voted America's number-one sports columnist ten times by his colleagues, tellingly misquotes Gehrig's farewell speech at Yankee Stadium on July 4, 1939. Gehrig said: "Today I consider myself the luckiest man on the face of the earth." Albom has him saying: "Today I *feel* like the luckiest man on the face of the earth" (emphasis added). This little slip is of the essence of the solipsism that infects *Tuesdays with Morrie*.

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The Orthodox Moment

Jack Wertheimer

Over a year has passed since a group of Orthodox undergraduates filed a lawsuit against Yale University and thereby set off one of the more interesting—and telling—controversies to have roiled the American Jewish community in the recent past. Claiming that Yale's policy of requiring all freshmen and sophomores to live in a mixed-sex dormitory was discriminatory—forcing them into an environment whose mores were sharply at odds with their strict religious and ethical sensibilities—the students requested either to be exempted from the requirement or to be housed in a single-sex residence "where rules against visitation by members of the opposite sex and against cohabitation are enforced."

That Yale itself stood firmly by its policy and elected to fight the suit was perhaps understandable enough. (The case, now making its way through the appeals process, may eventually land in the Supreme Court.) What was more puzzling, at least on the surface, was the reaction of the Jewish community at large. Rather than standing behind a group of students striving to live religiously observant and morally proper lives, most Jewish spokesmen rushed to the defense of the university and its with-it housing arrangements. Indeed, the undergraduates found themselves rebuked—by their fellow Jews—for seeking to establish a "ghetto Judaism" on an Ivy League campus.

This little vignette is rich in meaning. But in order to disentangle its threads, one needs to know something of the history and present-day configuration of the Orthodox community in America, and that is no simple task. Despite all the curiosity that has gathered around the recent "resurgence" of this law- and community-bound movement in the midst of freewheeling, individualistic, late-20th-century America, it is still a relatively unknown phenomenon, and much misunderstood.

At first glance, Orthodox Jews must seem a quantitatively negligible group within the landscape of American Jewish life. The 1990 National Jewish Population Study found that slightly over 6 percent of Jewish households identified themselves as Orthodox—a figure smaller by half than the proportion a mere twenty years earlier.* By contrast, the plurality of Jews in 1990 claimed an identification with Reform Judaism (38 percent), followed by Conservative Judaism (35 percent) and "none-of-the-above" (approximately 21 percent). In many smaller but growing communities—Flori-

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* Some critics question the 6-percent estimate, but no reputable demographer has suggested that the true figure exceeds 10 percent.

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da and other sunbelt areas—the Orthodox constitute an even smaller minority, comprising barely 2 or 3 percent of the Jewish population.

Most Orthodox Jews in the United States are concentrated in metropolitan New York, where (according to a 1991 survey) some 65,000 families reside. Half of these live in the borough of Brooklyn, with another 19,000 families in Manhattan and Queens, and far smaller numbers in the suburbs. Yet even in metropolitan New York, the Orthodox make up only 14 percent of all Jews. Among large and medium-sized communities, only in Baltimore does the Orthodox segment reach 20 percent of the total Jewish population.

Out of the 5.5 million Jews in the United States, then, the total number of the Orthodox is in the range of 400,000. Yet their actual impact is far greater than that number suggests, and for a simple reason: they show very high rates of participation in organized Jewish life. There once was a category of "residual Orthodox"—i.e., Jews who would pray only in an Orthodox synagogue but in fact would rarely attend; today, virtually all Orthodox males can be counted on to worship in synagogues at least once a week, and virtually all Orthodox Jews observe many if not most of the central precepts of traditional Judaism. They are vital to the maintenance of the community's religious infrastructure, including ritual baths and kosher butcher stores, bakeries, and restaurants. Orthodox Jews also constitute a significant proportion of those who give to Jewish philanthropies or volunteer their time for Jewish causes, and are vastly overrepresented in the ranks of professionals staffing Jewish social, educational, and religious institutions in local communities and national agencies.

In a medium-term perspective, the influence exerted by Orthodox Jews can only increase. For one thing, they are the only segment of the Jewish population experiencing natural growth through a high birth rate. "Modern" Orthodox Jews tend to have twice as many children as Conservative and Reform Jews; more "traditionalist" or "ultra-Orthodox" types have roughly four times as many children as their non-Orthodox counterparts. (I will have more to say about these various terms later on.) In some enclaves, it is the *norm* for the most observant families to have anywhere from eight to twelve children.

This fecundity will have noticeable effects on the larger Jewish community within a generation or two, particularly since, unlike the situation earlier in this century, the "retention" rate for Orthodox children has recently become very high. They tend overwhelmingly to marry other Jews, usually other Orthodox Jews, and usually at a young age (thereby further assuring high rates of fertility). By contrast, non-Orthodox Jews are barely replacing themselves, and their rates of intermarriage with non-Jews range from 30 to over 50 percent.

The great demographic unknown is whether, as the generations pass, Orthodox Jews will eventually conform to the larger pattern of American Jewish life and experience an erosion. As a general rule, the longer a family has lived in the United States, the smaller the likelihood its descendants will identify as Jews. Since, among the various Jewish denominations, the Orthodox show the highest percentage of first- and second-generation Americans, it is hazardous to predict that today's high retention rates will prevail far into the future; but there can be no question that, in the decades ahead, the Orthodox share of the engaged Jewish population will increase substantially.

But who are these Orthodox Jews, and what is the nature of their Judaism? Spokesmen for the movement maintain that Orthodox Jews alone are the legitimate bearers of Jewish religious tradition, by virtue of their rigorous adherence to *halakhah* (literally "the way"), the corpus of Jewish law handed down from generation to generation. Yet almost all modern Jewish movements—whether religious or ideological—have staked their claim to authenticity by linking themselves to the traditions and texts of the past. In that sense, Orthodoxy too is a decidedly recent phenomenon, to be distinguished not only from its non-Orthodox counterparts of today but also from that pre-modern Jewish reality in which, to quote the late historian Jacob Katz, "tradition was a self-understood and uncontested guide to both religious observance and religious thought." Orthodoxy, by contrast, is a *self-conscious* movement, one that defines itself in relation to modern circumstances and thus must contend for allegiance with alternative religious and ideological movements within the Jewish community.

As for the term Orthodoxy itself, which stems from Christian theological discourse, it was originally hurled at Jewish traditionalists as a term of opprobrium by their modernizing (and/or secularizing) antagonists in 19th-century Europe. In time, it came to be adopted with pride by the very groups it had been designed to insult. But, to the present day, it is used mainly in settings where denominational labeling prevails. Within their own communities, Orthodox Jews employ an entirely different range of categories, designed to identify the major lines of division *among themselves*.

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Those divisions are both plentiful and, to the outsider, more than a little mystifying. Thus, the "modern" Orthodox are set off against the "ultra-" Orthodox or *haredim* (literally, those who tremble—i.e., in fear of God), many of whom either entirely eschew or strictly circumscribe university study and participation in modern Western culture. A line of a different kind is drawn between the mystically inclined Hasidim in their diverse sects and more rationalistic types (Mitnagdim). Then there are various ethnic groupings, like the Syrians and Iranians, who try to maintain their traditions by marrying only among their own, and ideological clusters like the ardent supporters of Jewish settlements in Judea and Samaria or, on the opposite side of the spectrum, the anti-Zionist Satmar Hasidim who oppose Jewish sovereignty over any parcel of land until the messianic age.

The range of factions is noticeable even to the untrained eye. Modern Orthodox males dress in stylish business suits at work and either wear a small, unobtrusive skullcap or cover their heads only at prayer and when eating. Among the *haredim*, a black suit and white shirt are *de rigueur*, as is a large black skullcap or black hat. Many hasidic men wear a long caftan and on the Sabbath and holidays a fur-rimmed hat. Insiders instantly recognize each other by more subtle markers. Much is conveyed, for example, not only by the type of skullcap or hat worn, but even by the way it is angled on one's head.

Among women, too, there are telltale signs of identification. Although fashion is by definition mutable, modern Orthodox women, at least of a certain age, permit themselves to wear pants and to go bareheaded except in synagogue. Their more "traditionalist" sisters wear dresses of a length that ensures the adequate concealment of their arms and legs, and, if married, never leave home without a head-covering—a style that has been adopted as well by some modern Orthodox women concerned with modesty of dress.

ALL THIS reinforces the point that to speak of a single Orthodoxy is misleading. If there is any agreement in the Orthodox world, it is on matters of ritual practice (orthopraxis) rather than correct belief. Still, the varieties of religious stance within American Orthodoxy can usefully be understood as moving, basically, between two poles, each of which has specific European antecedents.

One orientation grew out of the approach to modernity known in 19th-century Germany as Neo-Orthodoxy and associated most prominently with the names of Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-88) and Esriel Hildesheimer (1820-99). While remaining faithful to Jewish law, the Neo-Orthodox embraced modern culture and the new opportunities opening to Jews in the wake of their civic emancipation. Hirsch's motto was *torah im derekh eretz*, a word play calling upon Jews to synthesize Torah with proper manners and the ways of the land in which they lived.

The Orthodoxy that emerged in America as a self-conscious movement in the period after World War I—modern Orthodoxy, as it came to be called—boasted a program akin to Hirsch's. Its goal was not to challenge or to reject American society but to "synthesize" the best of Western learning and culture with Judaism. As one of its leading exponents was fond of reminding his young charges, "the *yarmulke* is an indoor garment"—by which he meant that there was no need to parade one's separate identity in the public square. Under the banner of this ideology, the vast majority of American Orthodox Jews could study at secular universities, enter professions, and partake of American culture to no less a degree than their non-Orthodox counterparts. Modern Orthodoxy even had its own academic center, Yeshiva University, the two parts of whose name announced its synthesizing mission.

Although this brand of Orthodoxy did not go unchallenged, by mid-century the Orthodox future in America appeared firmly to belong to the accommodators. But then the second pole emerged. In the two decades bracketing World War II, a new type of immigrant began to arrive on American shores, as Jews who had never considered abandoning their traditional communities in Eastern and Central Europe were now forced to uproot themselves in order to survive. Unlike previous waves of newcomers, these Orthodox Jews had already experienced sustained exposure to the corrosive forces of modernity, and had developed a set of strategies to cope with them. Significant numbers, moreover, came from Hungary—where, in contrast to Germany, a version of Orthodoxy had been formulated that was much less welcoming of Western culture and much more intent on constructing barriers for self-insulation.

When they arrived here, the new immigrants set about methodically building institutions. In contrast to previous Jewish immigrants, they invested their resources less in ornate synagogues than in a network of schools—a fact that has had long-term and quite far-ranging consequences. If, in 1944, only 39 Jewish "day schools" existed in the United States

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(and only a half-dozen of these outside metropolitan New York), today, thanks to the deliberate strategy of the midcentury immigrants, there are about 500 Orthodox day schools alone, enrolling at least 150,000 students. Indeed, almost all Orthodox children of whatever stripe attend such schools, from their earliest years all the way through high school, and many young men and women then go on to intensive religious study in Israel or America for a number of years beyond.

Another shift of emphasis introduced by the newcomers involved the authority of the rabbi. Already in the late 19th century, certain Orthodox rabbis in Europe had developed a new conception of their role. Instead of limiting themselves to deciding matters of Jewish religious law, they had taken to expounding on matters of social policy, politics, and much else besides—all in the name of Torah. In America, this predilection offered a powerful weapon against the centrifugal forces of what one might call the local religion: namely, American individualism. Confronting a whole range of social circumstances not explicitly covered by Jewish law, Orthodox rabbis felt themselves empowered by precedent to render legal judgments on the basis of what they deemed best for their community. Some rabbis even turned themselves into electoral power brokers, invoking the sanction of Torah in directing their followers how and for whom to cast ballots.

Finally, the newcomers brought with them a much more aloof conception of the proper relationship between Orthodox Jews and their non-Orthodox co-religionists. This conception, too, had its roots in the late 19th century, when Central European traditionalists, concerned lest cooperative activities with religiously liberal Jews appear tacitly to acknowledge their legitimacy, ruled that all such activities were to be eschewed. (On this point, some of the Germans and some of the Hungarians agreed.) Applied to the American scene, the "separatist" strategy had consequences on the level of both clergy and laity. By 1956, a *halakhic* opinion devised by immigrant authorities barred Orthodox rabbis from continuing to work in concert with their non-Orthodox counterparts on local boards of rabbis or national Jewish organizations. The one major authority who declined to sign was Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, modern Orthodoxy's preeminent 20th-century leader and the mentor of the Yeshiva University-trained rabbinate. For Orthodox Jews "on the ground," especially in large population centers and most especially in New York, the new separatism meant that, even as business contacts continued, social and religious interaction with other Jews, hitherto a normal facet of life, virtually came to a halt.

In the space of just two generations, the immigrants who arrived at midcentury have transformed the character of American Orthodoxy, and have played a significant role in enabling it to surmount the tides of secularism and assimilation. But, history being a dialectical process, they have hardly been the only factor at work.

Thus, the worldwide release of Jewish energy that followed upon Israel's victorious emergence from the Six-Day war of 1967—an event whose effects were felt in such seemingly disparate realms as the movement to free Soviet Jewry and the rise of Jewish studies on American campuses in the 70's and 80's—undoubtedly played a major part in the strengthening of religious, and especially Orthodox, morale as well. So, too, did the prosaic fact that more and more Orthodox young people began to spend a year or two living and studying in Israel before resuming their lives and careers at home—an experience that left its mark in terms not only of deepened knowledge but of greatly enhanced group identity. Finally, the decline within American society at large of the "melting-pot" model of assimilation, and the growing legitimation and acceptance of ethnic "diversity," also functioned to encourage a more open display of Orthodox styles of dress and demeanor and to bolster Orthodox self-confidence.

The results of these combined influences are plain to see in any community with an Orthodox presence, but they are perhaps most strikingly on display among the younger representatives of modern Orthodoxy—i.e., the actual or spiritual children of the mid-century accommodationists. The generation now in its twenties and thirties, its ranks somewhat enlarged by "returnees" from other branches of Judaism who have been attracted by Orthodoxy's embracing communities, is generally more knowledgeable about Jewish texts, more punctilious in the observance of religious law and custom, and more intense in its devotion to the welfare of its group than the generation before, and possibly than any generation yet to be seen in America. To walk into any Orthodox synagogue where these young people and their families form a significant presence is to be struck by the sheer level of commitment and enthusiasm with which they conduct their lives as Jews.

Thus, on an ordinary weekday morning, usually beginning at six or thereabouts, several prayer services will be held to accommodate the schedules of

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young college-educated professionals before they rush off to their law firms or brokerage houses or foundation offices; some of them, in addition to reciting prayers, also manage to squeeze in extra minutes each morning for a session of Talmud study. At the end of the day, besides late-afternoon and evening prayers, classes are offered in a bewildering array of subjects from the practical (how to make utensils kosher, the laws of marital purity and how to observe them) to the academic (themes in Jewish philosophy, introduction to biblical exegesis). On Sabbaths and holidays, synagogues teem with families. Whatever these young people may be doing out in the secular world, the world of getting and spending, there can be no mistaking the fact that the true center of their lives is their religious community and the tight bonds of friendship and succor that tie them together.

Quite apart from the intrinsic fascination offered by this spectacle, which gives the lie to every post-World War II sociological prediction concerning the inevitable demise of Orthodox belief and practice, the dynamism of the new Orthodox generation has clearly had a salutary impact on the other major branches of American Judaism. As if by magnetic attraction, both Conservative and, more startlingly, Reform Judaism have, to varying degrees, been drawn inward and "rightward." This development is noticeable less in the area of essential theological belief than in such matters as ritual custom, the forms and language of prayer, and the education of the young; but there—as well as in a general heightening of Jewish literacy among those actively affiliated with synagogues—it is noticeable indeed.

To be sure, influence is a two-way street, and one could hardly expect Orthodoxy to be immune to larger currents in both the Jewish and the non-Jewish world. Indisputably one of the strongest pressures on today's Orthodox comes from the contemporary women's movement. Thanks to widespread college education as well as to an awareness of the many opportunities feminism has brought to women in the non-Orthodox movements, a significant number of both younger and older Orthodox women are experiencing what in different circumstances would be called "consciousness-raising." Although so far the women's movement within Orthodoxy has soft-pedaled more radical demands—the ordination of female rabbis, for example—even such lesser innovations as separate women's prayer groups have raised issues of legal and spiritual propriety that have threatened to split whole communities. Whether Orthodoxy will absorb or deflect feminism's inherently revolutionary demand for equal and interchangeable public roles with men may be the greatest question in its future.

THAT, HOWEVER, is hardly the only question about the future that agitates either the Orthodox or, for that matter, the non-Orthodox among American Jews. These days, indeed, worry tends to fix less on the pressures coming from feminism than on those coming from ultra-Orthodoxy. And in truth those pressures are quite severe, pushing Orthodox Jews as a whole away from their fellow Jews as well as from an engagement with American culture, while leading internally to an ever more zealous concentration on an ever more minute and seemingly picayune conception of ritual observance.

Perhaps the most trenchant analysis of this last phenomenon is that of Haym Soloveitchik,* a distinguished historian and the son of Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik. Originally "baffled," as he writes, by the spread of self-conscious ritual stringency in the Orthodox world, Soloveitchik traces its impetus to, in part, "the new and controlling role that texts [i.e., legal codes and guides to religious practice] now play" in Orthodox experience. Drawing a distinction not unlike the one by Jacob Katz I referred to earlier, Soloveitchik observes that a truly traditional way of life "is not learned but rather absorbed. Its transmission is mimetic, imbibed from parents and friends, and patterned on conduct regularly observed in home and street, synagogue and school." Today, by contrast, family customs and organically evolving tradition, along the model of pre-modern communities, have been supplanted by intensive yeshiva education and book learning, with its inevitable bias in favor of that which can be codified in print and its no less inevitable tilt toward the strictest—and therefore least exceptionable—interpretation of rabbinic law. In Soloveitchik's poignant formulation, many Orthodox Jews, "having lost the touch of His presence, . . . seek now solace in the pressure of His yoke."

Other implications flow from this text-centered orientation, in Soloveitchik's judgment. The most notable may be the broad authority that has come to accrue to acknowledged masters of talmudic law. In most Jewish communities in the past, the talmudic virtuoso practiced his specialty within the confines of the yeshiva. Today, his mastery "bestows upon him," in Soloveitchik's words, "the mantle of

* "Rupture and Reconstruction: The Transformation of Contemporary Orthodoxy," *Tradition*, Summer 1994.

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[communal] leadership." Increasingly within the Orthodox world, policy decisions are made neither by lay leaders nor by pulpit rabbis—who "merely" serve local communities—but by heads of yeshivas. This elite group is characterized above all by its relative insulation from the pressures of the larger community, Jewish and non-Jewish alike—as well as from the day-to-day experience of most Orthodox Jews. Cushioned from reality, and free to pursue a form of legal idealism, its members tend to worry less about the needs of their community than about the opinion of their legal peers, thus reinforcing a trend toward super-stringency that the political scientist Charles Liebman has aptly dubbed "extremism as the religious norm."

By far the most egregious and troubling effect of these developments has been to place the social and religious accommodationism of modern Orthodoxy on the defensive. Indeed, many "modern" rabbis, who once regarded themselves as speaking confidently for the movement as a whole, now find themselves beleaguered even within their own congregations.

For a variety of reasons, the parochial schools attended by most Orthodox youngsters are staffed disproportionately by teachers from the ultra-Orthodox, or *haredi*, world. Under their tutelage, young people have learned to suspect the credentials of their own synagogue rabbis. During late adolescence, moreover, when these same young people go to study at yeshivas in Israel, many develop a syndrome sufficiently widespread to merit its own name—"flipping," i.e., from a modern to an ultra-Orthodox perspective. Even those remaining inside the modern framework internalize, willy-nilly, something of the *haredi* perspective, a fact that can lead to unpleasant confrontations: recently, when a modern-Orthodox rabbi declared his intention to permit the Torah scroll to be carried through the women's gallery of his synagogue, a congregant demanded, "Who is your legal authority?"

Orthodox rabbis who continue to assert the modern position can find themselves castigated these days in more venomous terms even than leaders of the non-Orthodox world. Not long ago, a *haredi* rabbi publicly pronounced the president of Yeshiva University, Rabbi Norman Lamm, a "hater of God" for failing to subscribe to the separatist ideology. Rabbis who sanction prayer services for women have been vilified, and scholars, particularly in the Sephardi community, who espouse a somewhat more open-minded approach to the study of sacred texts have been muzzled.

In short, the battle for the next generation has already been joined, and bitter skirmishes are being fought over the world view that will be communicated in schools, summer camps, and youth programs. (Until what age may boys and girls study together? How much attention should be devoted to modern Israel and other non-"traditional" subject matter? Do the liberal arts have any intrinsic merit? And so forth.) Modern-Orthodox parents have come to expect that their children will reject at least aspects of their own outlook on life, and cannot even be certain that they will choose to attend a secular university, or pursue careers requiring advanced study.

The "haredization" of American Orthodoxy (to borrow the title of an essay on the subject by the sociologist Chaim Waxman) has naturally also driven a deeper wedge between the Orthodox and the non-Orthodox sectors of the Jewish community. Some of this stems from the newfound self-confidence of Orthodoxy as a whole—a self-confidence that pervades virtually every wing of the movement and that at times spills over into self-righteousness. But here, too, the *haredim* unquestionably lead the way, asserting their position without apology and sometimes without tact or civility. For a flavor of the new pugnaciousness, one need only peruse the advertisements placed in the *New York Times* by a variety of ultra-Orthodox groups. Some exhort Jews to stay home during the High Holy Days rather than attend synagogues where men and women will sit together. Others are content to proclaim the bankruptcy of non-Orthodox religious movements.

Such, however, are the workings of the separatist logic. Much of today's Orthodox world is socially segregated, comprising people who not only are suspicious of other Jews and their religious movements but actually know little or nothing about them, even if they live down the block or around the corner. Last year, for example, when a mixed group of Conservative Jews attempting to pray in the plaza near the Western Wall in Jerusalem was subjected to physical violence, even Orthodox Jews who disapproved of the violence could not comprehend why any Jewish group would want to pray without a physical barrier between the men and the women. It is, among other things, this refusal to credit the religious seriousness of other Jewish groups that has earned Orthodoxy a reputation for, in the words of a (sympathetic) critic in a recent issue of the Israeli magazine *Azure*, "closed-mindedness, snobbism, archaism, and preoccupation with minutiae at the expense of values."

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The only bridge between the growing *haredi* population and the non-Orthodox world is the somewhat shrinking group of the modern or, as they have increasingly come to call themselves, centrist Orthodox. Although some modern-Orthodox leaders have been resisting the claims to exclusive religious authority put forward by the *haredi* world, and have called for constructive engagement with other Jews, others seem paralyzed by their predicament. For anyone who cares about Jewish unity, this must be a matter of quite urgent concern; for if the separatists prevail, the chasm between the Orthodox and all other Jews may well become unbridgeable.

YET THE truth is that the Orthodox, including the *haredim*, are hardly the only forces abetting the polarizing impulse among contemporary Jews. To put it bluntly, the larger Jewish community has failed to comprehend—let alone to respect—Orthodox sensibilities, routinely characterizing Orthodox Jews *in toto* as "extremists," "fundamentalists," "medieval," "narrow-minded," and the like. That these characterizations are often false, or grossly misapplied, is bad enough. Worse, they serve to mask from non-Orthodox Jews the extent to which some of their own perspectives are, in fact, narrow-minded, extreme, and intolerant.

Which brings us back to the Orthodox Jewish students at Yale. In many ways these students represent a new phenomenon: modern-Orthodox Jews who are open to Western culture but (thanks in part to the impact of "haredization") much more aware of the tensions between it and Judaism, and also much more willing, in the name of Judaism, to adopt a culturally critical stance. If, in 1978, Joseph Lookstein, then the dean of modern-Orthodox rabbis, could dream of producing a generation that would experience "no clash between being a Jew and an American at one and the same time," today the Yale students, and many like them, do experience precisely this clash and are unafraid of saying so. What continues to distinguish them from the separatists is that they are determinedly trying to negotiate the conflict.

To this conflict, however, much of the non-Orthodox community seems no less determined to remain blind. In all the talk about the correctness or incorrectness of the students' decision to resort to legal action, what went virtually uncommented-upon was the challenge these young men and women were mounting not to Yale, but *to their fellow Jews*. They were objecting, let us recall, to being forced to live in conditions where they would be continuously exposed to personal behavior they deemed immodest, if not promiscuous. Here, surely, was an issue that ought to have provoked some reflection in a community that sends a disproportionately high percentage of its youth to colleges and universities.

Are the sexual "life-styles" these young Jews are tacitly, or not so tacitly, encouraged to adopt congruent with Jewish moral values? Should the Jewish community be implicitly giving its blessing to an ethos of cohabitation, just because it happens to have the blessing of Yale University? Is this how adult Jews really wish to be seen discharging their moral responsibility to the next generation? Rather than address such questions, most commentators simply dismissed the Yale students as parochial, suggesting that they obviously did not deserve to be at an elite university and should retreat to some place where they could be with their own kind.

The intention of the suit, however, was precisely to enable Orthodox students to find a place *at Yale*. In this sense, the *New York Times* had things exactly backward when it announced that the suit "opened a schism between Orthodox Jewry and the very idea of a liberal university." By provocatively asking whether the "pluralism" of today's campuses is capacious enough to make room for a point of view that regards campus liberalism as amoral, the suit actually challenged the limits of the university's *own* liberalism, as well as the reflexive liberalism of the Jewish community.

To be sure, there is no evidence that the Yale students viewed themselves as leading an exercise in moral debate. They acted out of their own religious needs. Their suit, however, might have led to such a debate—a debate that might usefully have extended to challenging, in the name of authentic Jewish values, the "progressive" sexual regime that has become institutionalized on American campuses. Had that happened, the wider Jewish community might have learned a thing or two about how truly to engage the dominant culture, rather than merely capitulating to its every fad and canon.

But that was not to be. Instead, the community convinced itself once again that not Judaism but the values of the larger culture were sacrosanct. And young Orthodox Jews, struggling with the deep tensions between their religious tradition and their desire to be involved in American society, were once again left shaking their heads at fellow Jews who just "don't get it."

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A Dissent on Isaiah Berlin

Norman Podhoretz

By the time Sir Isaiah Berlin died in 1997 at the age of eighty-eight, a thick layer of piety and even reverence had long since come to surround his name, and accordingly the obituaries both here and in England took it more or less for granted that he had been, if not the leading political philosopher of the age, then at least a strong contender for that position. He was celebrated for the brilliance of his mind, for the profundity of his thought, for the depth and range of his learning and—not least—for his steadfast defense of liberal values against their rivals both on the Left and on the Right.

Now, there can be no question that in some ways Berlin was an admirable figure. But there are also grounds for believing that he was overrated as a thinker (whether one classifies him as a political philosopher or more precisely as a historian of ideas). In my judgment, too, he suffered as a person from a serious character flaw that robbed even what many conservatives would consider his best and most valuable ideas of any real force in practice. These ideas were thereby prevented from having the salutary influence they might have exerted at certain crucial and difficult moments.

In due course I will get to my reasons for not joining in the chorus of adulation for Berlin, and why arriving at a more temperate estimate of him seems to me important to our general intellectual health. But I want to dwell first on why, even so, I was hit by a sense of loss when he died and by a great feeling of regret at how few were the hours I got to spend in his company. Sharp as it was at the time, this feeling has now been reignited and exacerbated by a reading of Michael Ignatieff's new book, *Isaiah Berlin: A Life*.[1] This is an official biography in that it was authorized by Berlin, who cooperated in every way. He did not, however, ask for the right to approve the manuscript. On the contrary, he refused to read it and stipulated that the book be published only after his death.

Ignatieff is a very good and a very intelligent writer, and not the least of his literary virtues is that he has been able to digest ten years of taped conversations with a famously voluble subject, a nonstop talker of legendary proportions, and then to recast all this material which, when transcribed, must have run into thousands upon thousands of pages, into a book running to only a little over 300. In this mercifully brief space, Ignatieff manages to do an excellent, if understandably quite uncritical, job of covering both the thought and the life of Isaiah Berlin.

One problem faced by Ignatieff is that Berlin never produced a major work conveniently pulling together the various elements of his philosophy. Nevertheless, Ignatieff is able to extract a lucid and

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[1] Metropolitan Books, 336 pp., $35.00.

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coherent account of it from the many scattered essays and lectures through which Berlin most naturally expressed himself. But there was also another kind of problem Ignatieff had to contend with in telling the story of Berlin's life—a life compounded, as Berlin himself once summed it up, of "three strands": Russian, English, and Jewish.

Being himself of Russian ancestry and a longtime resident of England, Ignatieff was well equipped to unravel the first two of these strands. But not being Jewish, he might have been expected to run into a bit of trouble with the third. Yet he almost always gets things right in dealing with its nuances and complexities—a feat that not that many Jewish writers would have been able to pull off with comparable accuracy, particularly when we consider that the strand of Jewishness in Berlin was further complicated by being both familiar and unusual.

The familiar part is the journey of a Jewish boy of eleven from Riga, Latvia (then under czarist rule), where he was born in 1909 and lived until the age of six, and then Petrograd, where he spent the next five years, to the upper reaches of intellectual life in the new country to which his family had been forced to flee. Countless such journeys with similar outcomes were traversed—both earlier and later, and by both rich and poor—to America: young immigrants arriving with little or no English and themselves or their children becoming within an amazingly short time major figures in the culture as writers, painters, composers, scientists, philosophers, professors, journalists.

One tends to assume that there were fewer such instances in England, whose society, being both more stratified and more insular, was less permeable than America's to foreigners of any stripe, let alone Jews. Yet as the economist P.T. Bauer—himself a penniless teenage immigrant "of Jewish origin" from Hungary who, capping a distinguished academic career, wound up sitting in the House of Lords—has never tired of pointing out, England was far more welcoming to foreign-born talent than is often imagined. Which is to say that the career of Isaiah Berlin *qua* intellectual was by no means unique. The faculties of Oxford and Cambridge and the London School of Economics (LSE) had a fair share of immigrant Jews (especially in the physical and social sciences) even before their number was swollen by refugees fleeing from Nazi Germany.

STILL—and here we come to the unusual part of Berlin's story—very few even of the foreign-born English Jews who were knighted, and/or made it to the House of Lords, ever ascended the most rarefied heights of English society to anything like the extent that Berlin eventually did. No doubt not all these people had the insatiable appetite for high society that was one of Berlin's ruling passions; some of them may positively have disdained dining with duchesses or becoming frequent guests at Buckingham Palace. But whether or not their ambitions ran in that direction, and whether or not, in one of Berlin's own formulations, they were great "diners-out," the fact of their Jewishness—however faintly they might have borne its stigmata or however distant they might have grown from the mores and practices of their ancestors—remained enough of a disqualification to keep them in their social place.

There may have been more exceptions to this rule than I am aware of, but the only one I happen personally to have encountered who scaled the same social battlements as Berlin was—and is—George Weidenfeld. A decade younger, a publisher rather than an academic, and a post-Hitler refugee from Vienna rather than from Bolshevik Russia, Weidenfeld still had much in common with Berlin. The two men also had a professional association that turned out to be very important. As Ignatieff informs us:

> Weidenfeld had been shrewd enough to see the commercial potential locked up in an obscure essay, "Lev Tolstoy's Historical Skepticism," which Isaiah had published in *Oxford Slavonic Papers* in 1951. By retitling it "The Hedgehog and the Fox," and putting it out for a general readership with additions by Isaiah, Weidenfeld did more for Isaiah's public reputation than any other publisher.

Like many (most?) of their foreign-born English co-religionists, above all in the universities and the intellectual world outside them, both men became thoroughly assimilated into British culture and as Jews they were both frank nonbelievers. Being such, they were also nonobservant, though they might (Berlin much more regularly than Weidenfeld) attend a synagogue on the High Holy Days or a seder on Passover. In Berlin's case, as he himself quipped, "the Orthodox synagogue is the synagogue I am not attending"—except, that is, on the High Holy Days; and "wherever he was in the world on Yom Kippur," we learn from Ignatieff, "he made a point of fasting." Also, "As long as his mother was alive he celebrated the Passover every year in her house." But after her death, Berlin being Berlin, the seder naturally tended to turn

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into "a grand social occasion, with Lord Rothschild, Lord Goodman, the painter R.B. Kitaj and Murray Perahia, the pianist, in attendance."

Yet nonbelieving and nonobservant though they were, both Berlin and Weidenfeld were entirely open about and comfortable in the skin of their Jewishness, and both were lifelong and highly dedicated Zionists. One might have thought that this would have denied them access to the most fashionable circles. Which is what happened, for example, to Sir Lewis Namier (1888-1960), a Jew from Galicia and a Zionist activist whose great achievements as a historian of 18th-century England were enough to earn him a knighthood and other honors without also securing him entrée (except for purposes of research) into the aristocratic world whose acceptance he yearned for in vain and to whose past he devoted enormous scholarly labor. But no such barrier was erected against Weidenfeld and still less against Berlin.

To be sure, Namier was so acerbic and unpleasant that (as Berlin himself tells us in a touching essay about him) not only was he spurned by the "London clubmen (whom he often naively pursued)" but, even though everyone at Oxford acknowledged his greatness and originality as a historian, he was also even repeatedly passed over for the professorship he coveted there. In the sharpest possible contrast, Berlin and Weidenfeld were so charming and witty and such great raconteurs as to be irresistible companions, whether tête-à-tête or at a large gathering. In combination with these qualities, their Jewishness perhaps lent just the right dose—not too much, not too little—of an intriguing exoticism. Someone once said that if you were in low spirits, there was no one you would rather see walk through your door than Isaiah Berlin. I would say much the same thing about George Weidenfeld, as would many others.

Apart from everything else, Berlin and Weidenfeld had no peers in the realm of classy gossip. Both also specialized in that branch of snobbish Jewish genealogy known in Yiddish as *yiches*, or distinguished family connections. Once, for instance, when on a visit to London I was invited to tea by Berlin at (where else?) the Ritz, I asked him in the course of an inevitably wide-ranging conversation about a Harvard professor with a name that the professor pronounced very differently from the way it was spelled. "Well, you see," Berlin replied with a wicked little smile as he told me how the name actually should sound—a pronunciation that immediately gave away its East European origin—the professor did not really mind its being known that he was Jewish, but he most assuredly wanted it thought that his family was not from Minsk or Pinsk but from an aristocratic Sephardi clan "in Mantua or Nantua, as the case may be." And where Gentiles were concerned, if by chance there were a Jew hidden somewhere in an aristocratic woodpile, Berlin and Weidenfeld would be more certain to have dug him out than the editors of *Burke's Peerage*. The question of converted Jews and the children of converted Jews also fascinated them: one of the best things Berlin ever wrote was an essay entitled "Benjamin Disraeli, Karl Marx, and the Search for Identity."[2]

Speaking of *yiches*, Berlin had plenty of it, both in his own right and by marriage. Through his father he was related to the Schneersons, the family of the Lubavitch dynasty of hasidic *rebbes*; and through his wife Aline, the granddaughter of the banker Baron Guenzburg, he was also connected to one of the richest and most eminent Jewish philanthropists in Europe. (Aline's inherited fortune was multiplied by her former marriage to a very rich man.) As a Zionist, he had *yiches* as well: Yitzhak Sadeh, one of the founding fathers of Palmach, the elite striking force of the Haganah, out of which after statehood the Israeli army emerged, was simultaneously his uncle and his cousin.

There was a certain *yiches*, too, in the fact that Berlin's Russian childhood differed radically from that of the vast majority of Jews who emigrated from that part of the world in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Most of them had lived in dire poverty and in the constricted physical conditions of the Pale of Settlement in Russia and the ghettoized *shtetlakh* of Poland, forbidden or unable to travel outside these areas or to practice certain occupations. But for a variety of historical reasons, the Jews of Riga were exempt from these rules. Berlin's father was a very well-to-do timber merchant, and his mother, while remaining a reasonably observant Jew, was far more highly cultivated than the typical Russian-Jewish woman of her generation. She read widely in secular literature in several languages, and Russian rather than Yiddish was spoken in the household. Berlin, an only child, even had a governess. Indeed, the family left Russia not because of czarist anti-Semitism but because of the Bolshevik assault on the bourgeoisie, the class to which they belonged. In this respect,

[2] The essay appeared originally in 1970 in *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England*, and was then reprinted ten years later in *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas*, edited by Henry Hardy and published in this country by Viking.

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the emigration of the Berlins resembled and anticipated the later flight of the prosperous Jews of Germany and Austria who succeeded in escaping from Hitler.

In any event, once the Berlins were settled in England, Isaiah was sent to the upscale St. Paul's school in London and then to Oxford, where he studied philosophy and would spend most of his professional life as a scholar and a teacher.

TO MY great good fortune, I have passed many hours in the company of Lord Weidenfeld (as he has been for some years now), but I was not so lucky with Sir Isaiah Berlin (who was both knighted and then decorated with the Order or Merit, or OM, an even higher honor than the life peerage awarded to Weidenfeld). I did, however, see enough of him to get a strong taste of the delights that his company afforded (even one meeting would have sufficed for such a taste). I therefore have no difficulty in understanding why he was sought after as a dinner guest in England by Lady This and the Duchess of That. The same was true of their untitled counterparts in America, whom he first got to know during World War II as a junior official at the British embassy in Washington.

His job in Washington was to write weekly reports on the state of American opinion, to be sent out under the signature of the British ambassador, Lord Halifax. But it was obvious to everyone, including Prime Minister Winston Churchill, that Halifax himself could not possibly have produced such brilliant work, and it soon became widely known that the actual author was, as the Foreign Office reported in response to Churchill's inquiry, a "Mr. Berlin, of Baltic Jewish extraction, by profession a philosopher."

Incidentally, Churchill's discovery of the identity of the author of Halifax's dispatches led to a wonderful comic episode. "In early February 1944," as Ignatieff recounts it,

> Clementine Churchill informed her husband that Irving Berlin was in London, and could he find time to thank him for his war work. On the contrary, the Prime Minister said, he must come to lunch. . . . The guests included Sir Alan Brooke, Commander of the Imperial General Staff, and the Duchess of Buccleuch. . . . At the head of the table, Churchill kept up a steady stream of talk about the war situation. At the end of lunch, . . . Churchill . . . asked Berlin when he thought the war would end. "Mr. Prime Minister, I shall tell my children and grandchildren that Winston Churchill asked *me* that question." By now thoroughly confused, Churchill asked what was the most important thing that Mr. Berlin had written. He replied, "White Christmas."

It was only after the lunch was over that Churchill's secretary "broke the case of mistaken identity to the Prime Minister," whose bewilderment of course gave way to great amusement. When the "Irving-Winston-Isaiah" story got around, it only served to enhance Isaiah's already rising status.

Being the genius of sociability he was, Berlin also (and, from the point of view of his professional duties, quite legitimately) used his job to make personal contacts. By the time he returned to England, he had gotten to know practically everyone who was anyone in Washington and New York. Enduring friendships were formed not only with upcoming young academics and diplomats of his own generation like Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., and George F. Kennan, but also with older public figures like Felix Frankfurter—as well, inevitably, as with great hostesses of the time like Alice Longworth (the notoriously wicked-tongued daughter of Theodore Roosevelt) and future ones like Katharine Graham (who would in due course become the publisher of the *Washington Post* and the American social equivalent of a duchess herself).

As I have already suggested, that this should have occurred is not in the least surprising. For, again with the exception of Weidenfeld—who would later travel in many of the same circles on both sides of the Atlantic—I have never in my life encountered a more effervescent conversationalist than Isaiah Berlin. He was not, as Ignatieff acknowledges, a great wit in the Oscar Wilde mode: he did not toss off epigrams that everyone would remember and quote. But there was wit in every other turn of phrase and in the way he framed the conceptions and descriptions with which he regaled everyone within earshot. Words poured out of him in such profusion and such a rush that his interlocutors sometimes had trouble understanding him, or else complained that they themselves could never get a word in when he was at the other end of a conversation. Yet in my own limited experience, I was always struck by how attentive a listener he could be—much more so than most of the great talkers I have known (and I have known my share). His mind was so quick that he could grasp a point one was making before it scarcely had a chance to get out of one's mouth; and he could give it back in a paraphrase that immediately cut to its intellectual quick.

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That Berlin was so awesomely articulate perhaps proved a greater gift to others than to himself. So, at any rate, he seems to have felt. He often denigrated his own achievements, a trait that might be considered the intellectual's equivalent of the unseemly game of a rich person playing at being poor. Yet Ignatieff, who speaks often of this habit, mainly interprets it as "part of a carefully cultivated strategy . . . intended to deflect and disarm criticism." Probably it was. For despite his oft-professed indifference to the opinions others held of his work, or for what posterity might say about it, Berlin was very thin-skinned—as the following story I recently heard sadly illustrates.

On the occasion of his eightieth birthday, when tributes were pouring in from all over the world and the British press could hardly find enough space to report on the encomia coming his way, a lone voice—that of the conservative philosopher Roger Scruton—piped up in one paper with a tribute that was not wholly free of a few mildly critical remarks. The scandal this article created within the British intellectual establishment was so disproportionate—Berlin's friends being as thin-skinned on his behalf as he was on his own—that a man who had been close to Berlin for many years was puzzled: what, he was heard to wonder at a private dinner party, was so terrible about Scruton's piece? This question was immediately relayed by the drum-beaters in the London jungle to Berlin, who responded to it the very next day with an eighteen-page handwritten letter full of hurt feelings and accusations of betrayal. Berlin even compared Scruton to Goebbels, and refused to retract when challenged by his morally stunned correspondent.

I TELL this story not in order to expose Berlin as a hypocrite for pretending not to care about his reputation, but rather as a suggestive piece of evidence for the genuineness of the self-doubt that afflicted him—an affliction that I would guess was caused by his inability ever to write anything that for dazzle and sweep could match his extemporaneous talk. This was a problem he tried to solve by dictating his essays, and his legion of admirers assured him and everyone else that he had succeeded. But Berlin himself, I suspect, knew better, which was why it was only after much persuasion from young disciples that he allowed those essays to be published—some for the first time—in a series of collections that were issued in his later years.

I gather from Ignatieff that Berlin was also tormented by his failure to write the big book, the great book, that was expected of him. When, in those same later years, he made a sustained effort to satisfy this expectation with a major study of Romanticism—a subject upon which he had touched in many of his essays—he spent much time reading and taking notes but, like a graduate student getting bogged down in a doctoral dissertation, he finally had to give it up.

Berlin, of course, was not the only great talker or lecturer whose written work never measured up to his spoken word. For example, anyone who reads Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* is bound to wonder why he was held in such intellectual awe by his contemporaries in the early 19th century; and one might well have felt the same way about Samuel Johnson's reputation among his own contemporaries a century earlier if there were only his *Lives of the Poets* to go by and James Boswell had never come along to record his table talk.

Good as Ignatieff's biography is, he is no Boswell. He therefore cannot help ill-serving his subject, who could really have used a Boswell, all the more so in that Berlin's published writings, even at their best, are not in the same league as those of Coleridge or Johnson. Coming closer to home for another case in point, I would also cite the American art historian Meyer Schapiro, a Lithuanian-born Jew whose lectures and conversation were in their own style as exhilarating and scintillating and rich in texture and context as Berlin's, but who similarly had trouble capturing it all on paper and could equally have benefited from a Boswell of his own.

Interestingly, Berlin himself makes a very similar observation about the 19th-century Russian revolutionary Alexander Herzen, who was "a brilliant and irrepressible talker . . . always in an overwhelming flow of ideas and images; the waste, from the point of view of posterity . . . , is probably immense: he had no Boswell . . . to record his conversation." Yet there was compensation for posterity in Herzen's memoirs, *My Past and Thoughts*, which Berlin considered "a literary masterpiece worthy to be placed by the side of the novels of his contemporaries and countrymen, Tolstoy, Turgenev, Dostoevsky." Never having read this book, I cannot say for certain that Berlin's praise is more than a bit extravagant, though I strongly suspect that it is. Be that as it may, Berlin himself left behind nothing that even his most fervent admirers would think of placing on so high a plane.

Herzen was not Jewish, and neither of course were Coleridge and Johnson. Furthermore, neither Berlin nor Schapiro ever had a truly extensive Jewish education. Nevertheless I cannot help wonder-

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ing whether there may not have been something deeply rooted in Jewish culture that produced the problem with writing experienced by them and a few other great Jewish talkers I could name. What I have in mind is the intimidating effect that talmudic pedagogy has sometimes had on those who have aspired to its deepest levels. Serious students of the Talmud have often been made to feel that they have no business saying anything at all until they have swallowed not only the vast "ocean" of the talmudic text itself but everything the commentators have said about it over the centuries, by which time they discover that anything they might have to add has been said already, and better, by some ancient forebear.

It is true that enough young people overcome the inhibitions this ethos creates to keep the enterprise alive and kicking; and there are those who are able to move with perfect authority into other areas as well. Being educated almost entirely at a Lithuanian yeshiva, for instance, did not prevent Harry Wolfson of Harvard from going on in later life to produce huge and definitive works on subjects as far afield from the Talmud as the early Fathers of the Church and the great medieval Islamic theologians. Still, all exceptions and qualifications duly noted, rereading Berlin's essays, with their incessant and compulsive references to the thinkers of the past, I got the sense that something like the inhibition that has stymied many Jewish scholars—imbibed, I would suppose, by osmosis as a child—was operating in him and that he was sincerely bothered by the conviction that he himself had nothing original to add.

I would exempt from this generalization his essay on Machiavelli, which begins with a breathtakingly concise survey of just about every interpretation ever offered of that notorious writer, and only then ventures on a new one of his own. Yet even here, revealingly, Berlin feels constrained to apologize:

> Where more than twenty interpretations hold the field, the addition of one more cannot be deemed an impertinence. At worst it will be no more than yet another attempt to solve the problem, now more than four centuries old.

WHETHER OR not there is any validity in my speculation,[3] rereading Berlin was a disappointment. Not that this came as a shock, since my very first introduction to him as a thinker about 45 years ago also resulted in disappointment. He was then (1953) teaching at Oxford, his home base for most of his academic life, and I was a student at "the other place" (that is, Cambridge), but the occasion was a lecture he gave at LSE. The lecture followed hard upon a series of six hour-long talks he had delivered in as many weeks on BBC radio on the general theme of "Freedom and its Betrayal." These talks had become famous not so much because they were difficult and devoted to relatively obscure thinkers like Helvetius and de Maistre as because they were done extemporaneously, from notes, without so much as a pause or a stammer. It was, as Ignatieff rightly says, a "prodigious feat of studied verbal improvisation," and it drew hundreds of thousands of listeners, turning Berlin, then about forty years old and not yet known outside academic circles, into a veritable national celebrity.

I never heard these lectures, but I did hear about them, and when I discovered that Berlin would shortly be speaking at LSE, I wangled an invitation through a friend who was studying there. The auditorium was packed, with the front rows occupied by all the great eminences of the LSE faculty (including Karl Popper, then at the height of his fame as the author of *The Open Society and Its Enemies*) and a large pack of highly distinguished academics who had come down from Oxford and Cambridge.

The excitement in the air was intensified by two titillating circumstances. One was that Berlin was to be introduced by Michael Oakeshott, the leading conservative thinker in England who, to the dismay and even horror of the socialists at LSE and elsewhere, had recently been chosen to succeed one of their main intellectual leaders and heroes, the late Harold Laski, as professor of politics. Obviously Oakeshott, the great critic of liberalism, would not wish to praise Isaiah Berlin, the great exponent of liberalism; but how would he get around the problem? And, since this was the first in a series of lectures that had been endowed to honor the memory of Auguste Comte—who a century earlier had, among other things abominable in Oakeshott's eyes, invented the idea of sociology as a science—Oakeshott would need to figure out how to avoid celebratory words about him as well.

A great hush, charged with suspense, thus descended upon the auditorium as Oakeshott ap-

[3] And I should make it clear that Berlin would have dismissed it as "absurd," just as he did, conversely, when his father (as Ignatieff writes) would "attribute his son's memory and scholarly achievements to his rabbinical ancestors." The same is true of the subject of *yiches*. Fascinated though he was by it, in his view, as summarized by Ignatieff, to take pride in one's origins was "to surrender to the dubious determinism of the blood."

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proached the podium. Glancing around with what seemed a look of disapproval bordering on contempt at the size and composition of the audience for this speaker on this subject, he welcomed us all to the first August Comte Memorial Lecture with the reminder that it had been a hundred years since Comte had burst upon the intellectual scene. At this point he paused and again swept the room with a disdainful glance before continuing: "And what a century it has been for *him*!"

Even Oakeshott's enemies, who far outnumbered his fans in this crowd, were forced to laugh appreciatively at so masterful a stroke, made even more telling by being left to stand alone with no further elaboration. But now it was Berlin's turn to get the Oakeshott treatment, and while it did not go down so well with this audience as his handling of Comte, it was also masterful. How fortunate we were, Oakeshott said, to have as our first Comte Memorial Lecturer the man who had so recently dazzled us all with the virtuosity of his performance on the BBC; so great was Mr. Berlin's virtuosity, indeed, that one might call him "a very Paganini of ideas."[4]

This was a very tough putdown to overcome, and Berlin did not do well. Although I was a liberal in those days, and on his side, I came away wondering why so much fuss was being made about him. The lecture was an attack on historical determinism, with which I entirely agreed but which seemed to me obvious, platitudinous, and—most unexpectedly—labored. Nor was I alone in my disappointment. Ignatieff:

> The fame he had acquired from "Freedom and Its Betrayal" guaranteed a full turnout; his nervousness was increased by Oakeshott's barbed encomium to his skills as a lecturer; and he had ludicrously overprepared. The text was much too long for delivery and he began abridging it as he went, wildly putting pages aside, struggling to keep the argumentative thread together, talking in an ever faster, high-pitched gabble. When he staggered to a conclusion, the reactions were perfunctory and polite and he came away, not for the last time, with the uneasy feeling that his peers were asking themselves whether his reputation was deserved.

Eventually, Berlin turned the lecture into a long paper entitled "Historical Inevitability," which Ignatieff characterizes as "an impressive statement of his most fundamental beliefs." That it is a statement of his most fundamental beliefs is certainly true; but "impressive"? Reading it today in a much fuller version than the one I heard in 1953, I was prepared to discover that I had been wrong about it back then. Instead, I was struck by how academic it is, how internal to the professional concerns of historians and other scholars, if somewhat less so than some of the other papers he wrote during this phase of his career demonstrating the fallacy of using the physical sciences as a model for history and philosophy—papers like "The Concept of Scientific History" and "Does Political Theory Still Exist?" (These can be found, along with much else that came later, in a recently published anthology of his essays.[5]) What struck me even more forcibly is how little—for all its many references to the world outside—it really touches upon the living impact of the main ideas with which it deals.

In making this judgment, I am saying exactly the opposite of what is always said by those who see Berlin as one of the major thinkers of the age. They praise him precisely for addressing himself (as one of them has put it) to "the general reader," for being "erudite but . . . not academic"; or (in the words of another) for the "everyday practicality" of his writings, and for bringing abstract ideas to life by confronting them through "the people who conceived them." Yet to borrow a phrase Berlin himself borrowed in another context from his friend and Oxford colleague, the philosopher A.J. Ayer, much that he wrote amounted to nothing more than "a dramatized tautology." At one point in "Historical Inevitability," he remarks, "All this seems too self-evident to argue." I could not agree more. That is how it seemed to me in 1953 and how it seems to me today.

But just as I would maintain that his essay on Machiavelli represents a rare escape from the inhibitions that may have undermined him as a thinker, there are two essays I would exempt from the strictures I have directed at "Historical Inevitability" and the other pieces like it.

The first is the famous "Two Concepts of Liberty." Here Berlin begins as usual with brilliant summaries of what all the other commentators

[4] In Ignatieff's version, the phrase Oakeshott used was "Paganini of the platform," but I am pretty certain that my version is the correct one. I did not know, however, that (again according to Ignatieff) T. S. Eliot, another conservative, had earlier come up with a barbed compliment of his own in congratulating Berlin for the "torrential eloquence" of the BBC lectures. Good, but in this case I would award the palm to the political philosopher rather than the poet.

[5] *The Proper Study of Mankind*, edited by Henry Hardy and Roger Hausneer. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 667 pp., $35.00.

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have said about his subject over the centuries. But this time the survey of past opinion serves directly to clarify a distinction—between negative liberty and positive liberty, the former consisting of freedom from external obstructions to one's will, the latter of the freedom to pursue a goal defined as the one and only true good—that is anything but academic, having instead the greatest bearing on how different societies have organized themselves politically.

It is also in this essay that he offers what may be the most effective and passionate defense he ever gave of his commitment to "pluralism." In Berlin's usage of the term, "pluralism" signifies that "human goals are many, not all of them commensurable, and in perpetual rivalry with one another." The human fate is to choose among these goals, without the comforting certainty that they have "eternal validity." But this, he insists, is at least better than the various species of "monism," according to each of which there is only one ideal we must aspire to and attain through reason or scientific method or revelation or some other means. "There is little need to stress the fact that monism, and faith in a single criterion," Berlin writes, "has always proved a deep source of satisfaction both to the intellect and to the emotions." But, he adds, it has also been used to justify "the a-priori barbarities of Procrustes—the vivisection of actual human societies into some fixed pattern dictated by our fallible understanding of a largely imaginary past or a wholly imaginary future."

To put Berlin's point a little less abstractly, "monism," sometimes disguised as "positive liberty," often leads to totalitarianism, while "pluralism" is at the basis of political freedom and its strongest guarantee.

THEN THERE is the even more famous essay, "The Hedgehog and the Fox," to whose publishing history I have already alluded. Contrary to what is often assumed, Berlin did not invent this image: as he tells us in the very first sentence, it comes from the Greek poet Archilocus, among whose surviving fragments is the line: "The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing." Nor is this mainly another essay about the superiority of pluralism (here represented by the fox) over monism (the hedgehog). Berlin does of course take up that theme and elaborates upon it once again with formulations that he has used before, and will use again, along with some that are new. But as its subtitle informs us, and as we know from the title of the original paper that Weidenfeld persuaded him to elaborate, "The Hedgehog and the Fox" is actually "An Essay on Tolstoy's View of History."

This is an accurate description as far as it goes, but it is also too modest, since Berlin uses Tolstoy's view of history—set forth in those large sections of *War and Peace* that so many readers have found irritatingly boring interruptions of the book's narrative sections—as a point of entry into the mind and spirit of arguably the greatest novelist who ever lived. Describing the qualities and powers that made Tolstoy great brings out the best in Berlin (as writing with unfailing generosity in appreciation of the genius of others always did):

> No author who has ever lived has shown such powers of insight into the variety of life—the differences, the contrasts, the collisions of persons and things and situations, each apprehended in its absolute uniqueness and conveyed with a degree of directness and a precision of concrete images to be found in no other writer.

Going on in these breathless cadences, Berlin picks up even more speed:

> No one has ever excelled Tolstoy in expressing the specific flavor, the exact quality of a feeling—the degree of its "oscillation," the ebb and flow, the minute movements . . . —the inner and outer texture and "feel" of a look, a thought, a pang of sentiment, no less than of a specific situation, of an entire period, of the lives of individuals, families, communities, entire nations.

And finally:

> The celebrated lifelikeness of every object and every person in his world derives from this astonishing capacity of presenting every ingredient of it in its fullest individual essence, in all its many dimensions, as it were: never as a mere datum, however vivid, within some stream of consciousness, with blurred edges, in outline, a shadow, an impressionist representation; nor yet calling for, and dependent on, some process of reasoning in the mind of the reader; but always as a solid object, seen simultaneously from near and far, in natural, unaltering daylight, from all possible angles of vision, set in an absolutely specific context in time and space—an event fully present to the senses or the imagination in all its facets, with every nuance sharply and firmly articulated.

Having delivered himself of this spectacularly unerring account of Tolstoy as a novelist, Berlin

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then abruptly, and without even a sentence of transition to soften the shock, asserts that "what [Tolstoy] believed in was the opposite." In other words, it was not enough for Tolstoy to be perhaps the greatest "fox" since Shakespeare (a writer he came to despise and disparage); what he wanted was to be a "hedgehog." In consequence, he himself

> preached not variety but simplicity, not many levels of consciousness but reduction to some single level— . . . some simple, quasi-utilitarian criterion, whereby everything is interrelated directly, and all the items can be assessed in terms of one another by some simple measuring-rod.

I once joked after reading a biography of Tolstoy (the one by Henri Troyat) that he emerges from it looking like a character out of Dostoevsky. Berlin goes even farther—in my opinion, much too far: "Beside Tolstoy, Gogol and Dostoevsky, whose abnormality is so often contrasted with Tolstoy's 'sanity,' are well-integrated personalities, with a coherent outlook and a single vision." But this presupposes, among other things, that Dostoevsky actually was, as Berlin classifies him (on the basis, I suppose, of his religious beliefs), a hedgehog. I, however, would argue that all great novelists, no matter what convictions they may hold or how single-mindedly they hold them, must necessarily be foxes, and that anyone who lacks the qualities of the fox cannot possibly succeed as a novelist; conversely, very few other kinds of writers can match the foxiness of the novelist.

Which is why I think Berlin spoils this otherwise splendid essay by bringing in Joseph de Maistre as another example of a fox who wanted to be a hedgehog. He spoils it in two ways: first by dwelling at length on the question of whether Tolstoy was more influenced by this 18th-century French counterrevolutionary, often considered the intellectual father of the French Right and of French chauvinism, than he was by Stendhal's novel *The Charterhouse of Parma*. But unless something more is done with it than Berlin does here, the question of influence is one of those truly academic issues of no great interest to anyone but professional scholars, and it is a weariness to the "general reader" (this one included) to whom Berlin's work is supposedly addressed.

The other way in which de Maistre's presence damages "The Hedgehog and the Fox" is that he does not enjoy the stature that would entitle him to co-star with a giant like Tolstoy. Emboldened by having learned from Ignatieff that Berlin was capable of discoursing with an air of authority about books into which he had only dipped, I am willing to admit that my own acquaintance with de Maistre is strictly of the dipping kind—and that, moreover, it took place many years ago. But surely it cannot be wrong to assume that he belongs in a lesser and lower realm than Tolstoy, and that speaking of the two of them as though they existed on the same plane undermines the unsurpassed tribute Berlin pays to Tolstoy himself.

BERLIN'S ESSAYS, then, could be undeniably impressive, and scintillating to boot, even if they do not seem to me to merit the hymns almost universally sung to his work and his ideas. He certainly deserves great credit for having liberated himself from the sterilities of the logical positivism on which he cut his intellectual teeth, turning his attention instead to the great moral and political questions that had been dismissed as meaningless by his friends and colleagues who belonged to that philosophical school. Coming when and where it did, this in itself was an intellectual achievement, and even a brave one, quite apart from the results it produced.

Possibly the most significant and consequential of those results was to have taught the educated English class, including the radically empiricist and even anti-intellectual historians and philosophers within it, that ideas are of supreme importance in human affairs. Berlin attributed his own appreciation of "the vast and sometimes sinister power of ideas" to his Russian origins, for "Russia is a country whose modern history is an object-lesson in the enormous power of abstract ideas" both for good and ill. It was a lesson the English, much more than the French or the Germans or the Americans, needed to be taught, and some of the adulation that came to Berlin in his adopted country probably originated in gratitude to him for having taught it. (The other side of the coin was that this same stubborn empiricist resistance to big abstract or metaphysical ideas, as Berlin saw it, made England the most civilized and the most politically admirable country in the world.)

He had other impressive qualities as well. No one could surpass him in the extremely difficult enterprise of summarizing and tracing the pedigree of an idea and in cutting to the core of another thinker's point of view. And he was especially good in dealing with thinkers like de Maistre whose opinions, though repugnant to him, he could invariably summon up the intellectual imagination to describe with sympathy and great insight. His portraits of major Jewish—or

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formerly Jewish—figures like Marx, Disraeli, Moses Hess, and Chaim Weizmann are also as delightful as they are illuminating.

But what, substantively, does it all add up to? The answer Berlin's admirers give is that, in an age when fascism and Communism were rampant and sometimes seemed destined to triumph, he developed a profound defense of liberal pluralism that escaped the great pitfall of relativism which (at least in its more extreme forms) he supposedly found just as (or anyway almost as) objectionable as the determinism of such monistic philosophies as Marxism. Yet for the life of me, I cannot perceive any solid logical or philosophical ground in his work for exonerating him from the charge of relativism. He recognizes that relativism, though it can be animated by a spirit of tolerance for and generosity toward other points of view and is thus an antibody to the dangerous disease of fanaticism, is nonetheless vulnerable to a disease of its own: namely, the spinelessness that can develop from the rejection of any absolutes and the correlative failure to develop rock-bottom convictions. But neither his writings nor his own behavior bear out the claim of muscularity that he and others made for his kind of liberalism as compared with some of the other schools of liberal thought emerging from the Enlightenment that he criticized and from which he dissociated himself.

In the last paragraph of "Two Concepts of Liberty," Berlin approvingly quotes the 20th-century economist Joseph Schumpeter: "To realize the relative validity of one's convictions and yet stand for them unflinchingly is what distinguishes a civilized man from a barbarian." Or again, in praising one of his heroes, the great Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann, Berlin writes:

> Weizmann had all his life believed that when great public issues are joined one must above all take sides; whatever one did, one must not remain neutral or uncommitted, one must always—as an absolute duty—. . . take part in the world's affairs with all the risk and blame and misrepresentation and misunderstanding of one's motives and character which this almost inevitably entails.

Yet, time after time, it was precisely this "absolute duty" that Berlin failed to discharge. Thus, when the universities—the institution to which he had devoted the better part of his life and which, with all its faults, came closer than any other to embodying the values he so volubly professed—came under assault by the radicals of the Left in the mid- and late 60's, where was Berlin? To put it charitably, he was nowhere to be seen on the field when the fight was raging most intensely. So much for his willingness to stand, in accordance with Schumpeter's noble dictum, unflinchingly for his convictions. When push came to shove, it was the relativism that won out over the convictions.

But there is more. I read in Ignatieff that Berlin's "distaste for the fashionable intellectuals of the 1960's . . . deepened into something approaching intellectual despair when he surveyed the student revolutionaries themselves." Ignatieff also tells us that "The whole experience of the 1960's made him uneasily aware that he had not understood the nihilist consequences of the Romantic esteem for sincerity and authenticity." He expressed this and kindred sentiments privately in letters to friends (e.g., "I feel depressed by the rapid growth of barbarism . . . among our young men," whom he then proceeds to compare unfavorably with the "revolutionaries of his own day"), but I personally cannot recollect, and Ignatieff gives no examples of, any pronouncements of this nature by Berlin in public. Just the opposite: in those very years of his "despair," he became a regular contributor to the *New York Review of Books*, in which the radicalism and/or barbarism that so distressed him in private were regularly accorded the greatest respect and found their most sophisticated intellectual defense.

ONE EVENING during this period—just when, disillusioned with the radical Movement that I too had in recent years been defending, I felt constrained to break with it altogether—I attended, along with my wife, a small dinner party given for the visiting Berlins by my former teacher Lionel Trilling and his wife Diana in New York; the only other guest was one of Berlin's oldest and closest friends, the British poet and critic Stephen Spender. To the delight of the Trillings, who had never approved of my association with the Left of the 60's and were pleased by my growing disaffection with it, I seized upon the occasion to ask Berlin why he was willing to collaborate so closely with the *New York Review*. Though Spender too was writing regularly for it, I did not address this question to him, because I knew that he, as Ignatieff puts it, prided himself on "communing with the young" (he had even had himself hoisted into one of the buildings occupied by the radicals at Columbia where, of course, Trilling was the great luminary of the faculty). Yet along with everyone else in the room,

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Spender joined in what turned out to be one of the best and most serious discussions I have ever participated in. Contentious issues and their many ramifications were explored with frankness on both sides, without any rancor, and with everyone trying to do justice to the position against which he was arguing instead of reducing it to an easily ridiculed caricature.[6]

My challenge to Berlin, however, did not focus only on the issue of student radicalism; it also concerned Israel. "You still consider yourself a Zionist, don't you?" I asked him. "Certainly," he replied. "Then," I pressed on, "why do you lend your prestige and support to a paper that regularly publishes enemies of Israel like Noam Chomsky and I.F. Stone?" This question seemed to take Berlin by surprise and for once in his life he did not have a ready riposte. But after a few seconds he responded, and with the friendliest possible smile: "I see. You are accusing me of being a fellow-traveler of a fellow-traveler."

He did not follow up this witticism with a defense either of the *New York Review* or of himself. There was, after all, no denying that Stone (in that period of his life) and especially Chomsky were bitter enemies of the Zionism to which Berlin had been committed all his life. This commitment even formed the basis of his understanding that nationalism was ineradicable (an understanding not common among liberals of his era, who mostly regarded it as the major cause of Nazism and lesser evils), and that utopian efforts to ignore or wipe it out in pursuit of the ideal of an internationalist brotherhood were doomed to fail. Such efforts, he warned, were even as likely to lead to mass murder as nationalism in its more aggressive phases could and did.

Instead, therefore, of trying to justify his connection with the *New York Review*, Berlin stood pat on his witty remark and sat for a while giving my question what looked like thoughtful consideration as we moved on to the general question of student radicalism. Yet as time went on, and as the attacks being mounted in those years by the Left against Israel became ever more ferocious, he remained as silent as he did about its assault on the universities and the liberal ethos embodied in them.

In Ignatieff's interpretation, Berlin comforted himself with the thought that as an exponent of "liberal moderation," he was following the example of his beloved Ivan Turgenev, the great 19th-century Russian novelist who in his own day had incurred the disfavor both of the Left and the Right. Turgenev, says Ignatieff,

> was accused throughout his career of ingratiating himself with the authorities and revolutionaries alike, and of securing the trust of neither side. Even Herzen, who respected his literary genius, thought Turgenev an equivocating old maid in politics.

Having supplied this softening and rosy context, Ignatieff gets to the most serious criticism that can be made of Berlin:

> Such, in crude terms, was the charge whispered behind Berlin's back throughout his steady ascent through the upper reaches of English life: . . . . All of these failings amounted to the single indictment that he lacked the existential courage to stand and be counted.

Ignatieff makes a valiant, if unsuccessful, effort to show that Berlin was innocent of the whispered charge. But Berlin himself was honest enough to recognize how much truth there was in the indictment, for (as Ignatieff himself emphasizes) "the charge of cowardice bothered him all his life" and "caused him real anguish." As well it should have done, considering how fearful he was of taking public political stands that might jeopardize his ever-growing intellectual and social prestige, or that might—to throw his own words on Weizmann back at him again—expose him to "the risk of blame."

A particularly distasteful example of his aversion to such risks concerned the writer Goronwy Rees, who had been Berlin's dear friend for many years. Some time after Guy Burgess, a mutual friend of theirs, escaped to Moscow just as he was about to be arrested as a Soviet agent, Rees published a series of articles about his now notorious old companion in a sensationalist tabloid. There he gave details of Burgess's libertinism as an incorrigible drunk and a wildly promiscuous homosexual, and strongly intimated that other spies like him were still at large in the British establishment. (He meant the art historian Anthony Blunt, who had not yet been exposed.)

For turning on dear old Guy in this vulgarly anti-Communist way, Rees was excommunicated by virtually the whole intellectual establishment of the country, most of whom, though loyal English-

[6] To my astonishment and, if truth be told, disgust, I later learned that in reporting back to their friends in England on this discussion, Berlin and Spender said that they had spent a whole evening being berated by the editor of Commentary (as I then was) merely because they wrote for a rival publication. No wonder Berlin was (so Ignatieff reveals) sometimes accused of being "feline" as a gossip.

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men themselves, found a certain merit in the novelist E.M. Forster's declaration that, given the choice, he would rather betray his country than his friend. But even Berlin, a principled and passionate anti-Communist who, Ignatieff assures us, "never had any difficulty thinking of himself as a cold warrior, as a liberal defender of the capitalist world and its freedoms," joined in the anti-Rees orgy. More unlovely yet, when Berlin ran into the left-wing journalist Tom Driberg at the Indonesian embassy in Moscow and heard that Driberg would be seeing Burgess, he asked him to send the traitor "his warmest love" and to tell him that "none of us are speaking to Goronwy." This, despite the fact that Berlin's stated reason for being angry with Rees in the first place was that he thought Rees had hintingly accused him of having once been in cahoots with Burgess.

The two men later had something of a reconciliation, and the day after Rees died, Berlin wrote in a letter of consolation to Daniel Rees that "Your father's death is a deep grief to me"—so deep that he would be unable to speak at the memorial service: "too much painful feeling." Later, however, when he was invited to speak anyway, he begged off on the ground that he did not know how to deal with Rees's own suspected involvement in espionage. More likely the truth was that he did not wish to make so public a gesture of identification with a man who had come to be regarded as a renegade by much of the world Berlin lived in.[7]

ZIONISM AND the fruit it bore in the state of Israel might seem to have provided Berlin with the chance to show some bravery; and at two points, at least, they did. Being an outspoken Zionist did indeed require courage in the England of the 30's and then again during the period of fierce anti-Zionism of the Attlee-Bevin government that came into power right after the war and that was aggravated by the Jewish struggle to drive the British out of Palestine. This was especially true in the social circles in which the young Berlin aspired so passionately to move as a full-fledged member. But his loyalty to the Jewish people was so solid and unswerving that it overcame his social ambitions and anxieties.

As, however, the account I have just given about the evening at the Trillings demonstrates, the same loyalty—which I have not the slightest doubt Berlin continued to feel—was not enough to loosen his world-famously loose tongue when it took even greater courage to defend Israel, this time not only in high society but also in the universities and among intellectuals in general. Or rather, it loosened his tongue to the opposite effect. Here is how Ignatieff describes Berlin's decision to make a rare public pronouncement about Israel toward the end of his life:

> Like his hero Turgenev who, when dying of cancer, had dictated "A Fire at Sea" . . . to acquit himself of a charge of cowardice, Berlin dictated a public appeal for political compromise in Israel. On 16 October 1997, on no one's initiative but his own, he composed a statement imploring Israelis to accept a final partition of the land with the Palestinians. . . . The alternative, he warned, was an interminable cycle of terrorist chauvinism on both sides and savage war.

Incredibly, Berlin thought, and Ignatieff agrees, that this statement showed courage. Of course, the fact is that it merely put Berlin solidly in line with the opinion being voiced by practically everyone else in the world. I am not suggesting that these were not his true sentiments. After all, in what may well have been the only time in his life he ever did such a thing, he had once refused to shake the hand of Prime Minister Menachem Begin because, as head of the Irgun in the pre-state period, Begin had been responsible for the bombing of the King David hotel, which then served as the headquarters of the British mandatory forces. And if a rumor going the rounds can be believed (it seems plausible enough), Berlin declared after Benjamin Netanyahu became Prime Minister that he had never hated anyone so much in his life.

In making the case for Berlin's greatness as a philosopher of liberalism, Ignatieff argues that

> empathy was, for Berlin, the core liberal attitude—the capacity to be open, receptive, unafraid in the face of opinions, temperaments, passions alien to one's own. . . . The result was a moral psychology of liberal life which, while unsystematic, was as deep as anything within the liberal canon since Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments.*

Well, while such empathy could be summoned

[7] Neither the story about the message Berlin sent to Burgess through Driberg nor the one about his refusal to speak at Rees's memorial service comes from Ignatieff (who skates hastily over Berlin's relations with Rees on the one side and Burgess on the other). I found them in Jenny Rees's fascinating book about her father, *Looking for Mr. Nobody: The Secret of Goronwy Rees*, which was published by Weidenfeld and Nicholson in England but has never found an outlet in America. Her sources were Driberg's autobiography, *Ruling Passions*, and the letters she found among her father's papers.

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forth by Berlin for the extreme rightist views of a Joseph de Maistre, it clearly ran smack up against its limits where the hawkishness of the Israeli Right was concerned.[8] Nor did his commitment to and capacity for toleration extend to serious religious belief:

> Happy are those who live under a discipline which they accept without question, who freely obey the orders of leaders, spiritual or temporal, whose word is fully accepted as unbreakable law; or those who have, by their own methods, arrived at clear and unshakeable convictions about what to do and what to be that brook no possible doubt. I can only say that those who rest on such comfortable beds of dogma are victims of self-induced myopia, blinkers that may make for contentment, but not for understanding of what it is to be human.

Admittedly, Berlin seems to have been thinking here more about the followers of fascist leaders than about Roman Catholics or hasidic Jews like his own Lubavitcher cousins. Nevertheless, in this statement, so violently discordant for an apostle of tolerance to let slip from his pen, he makes not the slightest effort to distinguish between the "spiritual" and the "temporal." All the more outlandish do I find this when I read in Ignatieff that

> For all his skepticism . . . he was repelled by the callow anti-clericalism of the Voltairian Enlightenment and had traced most of the evils of the 20th century to the idolatry of secular reason. "Stone-dry atheists," he once wrote, "don't understand what men live by."

Yet the very same person who could write and think such things was capable of denying to the truly religious an understanding of "what it is to be human" (!) and to lump them together with fascists and Communists.

An extraordinarily brilliant man, then, a conversationalist of genius, and the most amusing companion one could ever hope to have, but not the great thinker he is so often taken to be. Even less is Berlin the moral hero that his biographer tries to make of him in an effort to cover over the spinelessness that the relativistic core of liberalism, even in its most sophisticated and civilized form, invariably brings out when determined challenges are posed to it, especially from the Left.

We see this once again today in the supine response of liberals to "multiculturalism," which can be understood as a diseased mutation of the pluralism that Isaiah Berlin never ceased extolling. Pluralism as Berlin expounded it had real force when fascism and Communism were riding high, and when, to its eternal honor, it formed one of the crucial elements making the case for bourgeois democracy as the superior alternative. But today, when "multiculturalism" is all the rage, in England as well as in America, it can be of no help and may even do harm in the struggle to prevent the balkanization of our common culture and the dissolution of its intellectual and academic standards.

This is a process that I cannot believe Berlin himself would have wished to encourage. For to give credit where credit is due, he knew very well that pluralism was vulnerable to such diseases. Yet because he also knew that he had never really found a philosophical way of immunizing it against the ravages of relativism, and because he could never bear to be unpopular or to overcome the need to ingratiate himself—a need of which he was entirely aware and that he sometimes thought stemmed from his Jewishness—he made no contribution to the fight against multiculturalism while he was alive, and ideas like his still bear a certain responsibility for its spread.

A few months ago, at a symposium in New York on his work, critical questions of a kind rarely heard before were raised by a number of political theorists, mostly of the Left. It is much more common, however, for liberal intellectuals—in trying desperately to resurrect a point of view grown moribund with softness—to seek inspiration in the apparent solidity and strength of Isaiah Berlin's conception of liberalism. But they are misleading us when they inflate the importance of this great equivocator, and they are kidding themselves when they look to his writings as the source of a new moral validation and the fount of a new intellectual vitality.

[8] Namier once ranted (in Berlin's paraphrase) that "The Jews of England were victims of pathetic illusions—ostriches with their heads in some very inferior sands. . . ." For Namier, this was typically intemperate, but as always with him, there was something to it. Witness the fact that English Jews like Isaiah Berlin, who could write so movingly about Churchill, and even Churchill's own biographer Martin Gilbert, have been advocates of a "peace" policy toward the Arabs that in the European context they would not have hesitated for a second to denounce as appeasement or to predict could only lead to war.

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Fixing Social Security

Amity Shlaes

In the fall of 1936, as the country entered the eighth year of the Great Depression, the Social Security Board printed and issued to American workers a small, resonant circular labeled *ISC 9*. "There is now a law in this country," the pamphlet instructed, "which will give about 26 million working people something to live on when they are old and have stopped working." According to the new law, the federal government would "set up a Social Security account for you, if you are eligible," and into this account "you and your employer will each pay three cents on each dollar you earn, up to $3,000 a year." (That figure, the circular added, "is the most you will ever have to pay.") Then came the promise: "From the time you are 65 years old, or more, and stop working, you will get a government check every month of your life." This check—the pamphlet added in a ringing tone—"will come to you as your right."

Today, sustaining the "right" to Social Security has become the greatest domestic-policy challenge we face. For, however faithfully the promise of *ISC 9* may appear to have been kept in the past, it is now widely accepted that it cannot be kept in the future. Less than fifteen years from now, we have been told, this enormous national program will move into deficit. Within 35 years, it is expected to go bankrupt. The funds will empty, the giant ship will run aground.

Many Americans appear to be accepting this projected state of affairs as a simple inevitability. Younger workers, who pay more in Social Security taxes than any comparable group in the nation's history, seem resigned to a future in which they will not be able to rely on a government-subsidized annuity in their retirement. According to a poll conducted in 1994 by Third Millennium, a group formed to represent Americans born after 1964, more young people believe in the existence of UFO's than that Social Security will still be around by the time they become eligible for it. As for older workers and retirees, the focus of *their* attention is how to preserve the benefits already or soon to become due to them.

Washington has approached this grave problem in its usual hurry-up-and-wait fashion. After maintaining a long silence, President Clinton finally set off a round of activity last year by making the cause of "saving Social Security" the centerpiece of his 1998 State of the Union address. As impeachment hearings ground forward late in the year, he swore that not his own fate but Social Security's remained uppermost in his mind, and that he would return to the subject in his 1999 address as well.

In the circles where weighty policy matters are most vigorously discussed, Social Security has, indeed, been an issue much on people's minds. A number of different attitudes have been struck.

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Labor unions and other groups have for the most part rallied around the goal of adjusting the current system so as to preserve it more or less as is. In the Center and on the Right, the possibility is bruited of deeper change, either by having government invest some share of existing Social Security funds in the stock and bond markets, in the hopes of higher returns than are currently earned, or by privatizing contributions to Social Security through the creation of individual retirement accounts for workers. The implications of the latter move would indeed be quite sweeping.

Yet neither shoring up Social Security nor privatizing it will be a simple matter. The task is much greater than reshaping the tax code or ending welfare, to name two other great national projects lawmakers have undertaken and only partially succeeded at in recent years. To understand the scope of the challenge presented by the crisis in which the system now founders, it may help to consider the nature of the original enterprise.

THE IDEA that it is somehow proper for the government to protect old people did not start with the New Deal. Writing in 1795, in a pamphlet entitled *Agrarian Justice*, Thomas Paine, a British subject despite his years in America, proposed to his mother country that it increase its inheritance taxes to ensure

> ten pounds sterling per annum during the life of every person now living of the age of FIFTY years and to all others when they shall arrive at age to enable them to live on old age without wretchedness and go decently out of the world.

For almost a century and a half, little was done along these lines either in England or in the United States. But when our own moment of national "wretchedness" arrived in the form of the Great Depression, Americans began to appeal to government to save them from the nightmare of a penniless old age. By the mid-1930's, approximately eighteen million individuals had become dependent upon emergency relief, and there was "insecurity at every stage of life," in the words of a federal commission appointed by Franklin D. Roosevelt to come up with a solution. The New Dealers, like Paine, felt strongly that a service formerly performed by the private spheres of church and family now *had* to be taken on by government.

FDR's was by no means the most expansive of the plans to be advanced. To the President's Left, the flamboyant Huey Long, former governor of Louisiana and now a U.S. Senator, advocated taxing the wealthy and privileged to create a subsistence income for all families, including retirees. There was also Dr. Francis Townsend, head of a powerful movement of 3.5 million members organized in 7,000 clubs that agitated for subsidizing the aged through a 2-percent sales tax on all retail, business, and commercial transactions.

But it was the federal commission's plan that was finally embraced by Congress in the form of the Social Security Act of 1935, and that was summarized for American workers in *ISC 9*. The plan, as it happens, did not work quite the way the pamphlet described it. Money did not flow into individual "accounts"; it went into general accounts. Moreover, although these were labeled "Trust Funds," the money held in trust was not used in trust—it was dispensed to Social Security's first recipients. What was officially known as a trust was really a redistributionist scheme in which younger workers were not saving for their own retirement but were transferring money to older workers, a scheme that critics of Social Security would time and again liken to the famous chain-letter investor trick, the Ponzi scheme.

The nature of the scheme was clear even in the 1930's. "Here's Proof of Deceit in Payroll Tax: Money Not Set Aside for Pensions," read a November 1936 headline in the *Boston American*. "You're sentenced to a weekly pay reduction for all your working life," warned opponents in a flier campaign: "You might get this money back . . . but only if Congress decides to make the appropriation for this purpose. There is *no* guarantee."

The Supreme Court was later to confirm the skeptics. In a 1960 case, *Nestor* v. *Fleming*, it ruled that an individual had no constitutional "right" to Social Security pension money just because he had formerly paid taxes into the system. The only real contract in Social Security was a broadly political one: Congress specifically, and government generally, would not let old people down.

FOR A long time, this sufficed. One in four workers was unemployed in the Depression; more than a quarter of all families had lost their homes; and very few Americans had private pensions. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that for these people Social Security was a godsend. Moreover, if the national economic emergency made Social Security welcome, demography made it possible. In the 1930's, the retirement age was 65 but the average life expectancy also lay below 70. There were thus many more workers to pay into the system than there were senior citizens to collect from it. (Besides, only those seniors who had sufficiently contributed were

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entitled to benefits.) This advantage—the demographic advantage—made the numbers work.

The basic arrangement was only strengthened and solidified by the baby boom that took place after the end of World War II. As the members of that 77-million-strong cohort came of age and entered the workforce, the transfer system from young to old became ensured for a full generation. And if the baby boom helped to yield a boom for Social Security, it was not by dint of sheer numbers alone. Americans coming of age after the war *could* work, and did work. By the 1950's, the country was enjoying astoundingly low unemployment rates and astoundingly high growth rates. These rates—four, five, or six percentage points a year—continued, with blips, into the 1960's and even the 1970's. An expanding economy and increasingly higher wages became accepted facts of life, and they gave Social Security the appearance of robust health.

So popular was the program in these decades that few complained when *ISC 9*'s promise of a maximum contribution of three cents on the dollar went by the political wayside, or when the wage base subject to the Social Security tax went from its original limit of $3,000 to $3,600 after the war, $4,200 in the mid-1950's, and $6,600 by 1966. After all, if payments rose, so did benefits; after 1975, the wage base subject to Social Security tax rose every year with the cost of living, and benefits also rose automatically.

Social Security delivered so well, indeed, that it begat copycat programs. In 1965, President Lyndon Johnson leaned on the model of Social Security to rally support for creating a sibling, Medicare, that would guarantee universal health insurance for Americans over 65. The 1970's saw the introduction of Supplemental Security Income, a program that serves the blind and disabled and, though funded by income-tax revenues, is run by the Social Security administration.

If Social Security has long enjoyed a positive image in the national mind, there are good reasons for it. First, and hardly insignificant, is the fact that the Social Security administration is efficient—the entire program is manned by a relatively small bureaucracy of 60,000, in contrast to the more than 100,000 at the IRS. Unlike the income tax, moreover, Social Security is a dedicated program, one that gives people a clear understanding of what they are paying for and therefore inspires very few complaints.

Adding to the appeal of the program has been the relative predictability of its "bite." Unlike the federal tax code, Social Security has seen only seven major changes in its six-decade history; the latest rounds subjected a share of benefits to income tax in the case of higher earners, and raised the worker's share of payroll taxes (Social Security, Medicare, and the like) to 7.65 percent. (That figure is higher for individuals who are self-employed.) Finally, the agency works hard to please the picky senior citizens who are its beneficiaries by cushioning them against even the tiniest of changes with plenty of help and advance warning.

In the end, though, it is not these emollient factors but economic growth and demography that have enabled the government to maintain its image of a gentle and all-giving provider. But now growth rates and labor-force participation are no longer strong enough to assure the program's future solvency, and demography is cutting decisively the wrong way.

Today's senior citizens live much longer than their Depression-era forebears: women (according to a 1994 study) now survive on average to 79 and men to 73.6, and those figures are expected to rise by about five years every decade. This alone means that the returns realized by Depression-era retirees on their Social Security "investment"—many times their original contributions in cash payments—will be barred to future senior citizens. Because there are far fewer younger people around to support the aging wave of today's baby boomers as they become senior citizens, it can be predicted with confidence that, absent change, the money will run out.

Hence the current mood of emergency.

IN PRACTICE, all of the reformers now coming to the table start from the same premise: that there are three ways to "save" Social Security. The first is to raise the amount collected, thereby generating sufficient revenue to continue funding the program in something similar to its current form. The second is to reduce benefits. The third is to increase returns—to make the money collected work harder so that, come the year 2030, there will still be enough to go around.

The AFL-CIO and some Democrats in Congress have opted for the first approach: raising the amount collected. The least popular way to do this is by increasing the Social Security tax itself to a whopping 12 percent or even higher. Another approach toward the same end is to lift Social Security's "cap." Right now, individuals pay a payroll tax on the first $70,000-odd they earn, and then the payment stops: every dollar after that is free of Social Security tax. What the AFL-CIO is proposing to do is to raise the ceiling to the point where, as with Medicare, all income would be subject to the tax.

But these proposed adjustments bring problems

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of their own. Payroll taxes are already heavy; if, as the Left complains, the Social Security tax is regressive—hitting lower earners the hardest—pounding workers with a levy of 10 or 12 percent will only make matters worse. As for lifting the cap on wages subject to Social Security tax, that may well appeal to redistributionists, but it would entail a hike so enormous—raising top marginal tax rates from 41 to 50 percent—as to threaten the general health of the economy. (As economists on both the Left and the Right have noted, the effective tax burden would actually be higher, since in calculating it the employer's contribution would also be taken into account.) Such an increase would put America's tax bite on a par with the most highly taxed nations of Europe, now mired in long-term stagnation—hardly an inviting prospect.

This brings us to the second line of attack: reducing benefits. These now range from an average of around $750 a month to a maximum of around $1,300. But cutting this amount is seen, rightly, as akin to tackling Everest by its unclimbable north face. True, Congress has played at the foothills by treating benefits to higher earners as taxable income. But politicians are understandably scared to reduce benefits in *any* program of universal entitlement, let alone one so sacrosanct as Social Security. Few who witnessed it will ever forget the spectacle of Dan Rostenkowski, the Democratic former chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, being chased into his car by furious retirees after Congress passed the short-lived Catastrophic Health Care Bill in the late 1980's. Nor are Republicans unmindful of how they were singed at the polls in 1996 for seeking to curtail the rate of growth of Medicare.

A more indirect way of cutting benefits (as also of increasing the sums collected) is to encourage citizens to work longer by postponing the age at which they will begin to get Social Security. (Already that age is set to move from 65 to 67.) As a short-term fix, this has its attractions, though the politics of it are again dicey. And then there is the possibility of reducing benefits by taxing them; but 85 percent of Social Security benefits are already subject to tax for higher earners, so there is little meat left on that bone.

All this is no doubt why policy-makers have increasingly turned to the third solution for redressing Social Security's coming imbalances: increasing the return on the worker's money.

Historically, that money, once paid in, has been invested in government bonds at a low—but "safe"—rate. There are two basic ideas for altering that arrangement, of which the first is to allow the government to invest some of the funds in the stock market.

How would this work? As spelled out by such experts as former Social Security head Robert M. Ball and Henry Aaron of the Brookings Institution, we would create something like a national version of the savings plans—401(k), 403(b), and the like—now available to individual Americans. In effect, the government would become a player in the market, tapping into the economy like any other investor but using the resulting revenues specifically to buttress the Social Security fund's anemic performance. Lawmakers who advocate such a national 401(k) point to the Federal Reserve as one existing government institution that already has a hand in shaping the market yet remains a model of fiscal rectitude; their own favored plan, they remind us, would be rigorously safeguarded from corruption and fraud by an independent panel of supervisors.

One wonders. If the government enters the market to the tune of tens or, possibly, hundreds of billions of dollars a year, it will inevitably become not just a player but an extremely powerful one. Whether it will always act in the citizens' best interest—as opposed to the best interests of whoever happens to be holding power in Washington—is open to question. Nor, on another level, is its investment strategy likely to be immune to political and ideological pressures from all quarters.

In this regard, the experience of public pension funds on the state level has not been promising. California's "Calpers," Maryland's state employees fund, and other such plans have all been challenged by groups demanding that the states practice "social investing." To envision the problem on a national level, imagine a decision on the part of the Social Security administration to enrich its clients by purchasing large amounts of stock in R.J. Reynolds or Philip Morris; or, rather, imagine the dollar signs that would dance in the heads of tort lawyers representing the anti-smoking lobby.

FINALLY, THERE are the privatizers. They, too, would turn to markets to strengthen the Social Security funds, but they would do it not by creating a national 401(k) run by the government but by directing the payments made by workers, or some part of those payments, into individual accounts. That is, rather than relegating his entire payroll tax to the Social Security trust funds, a citizen would put a share of his tax into something like an IRA or 401(k), and collect the money on retirement.

Backers of such a plan include Democratic Senators like Daniel Patrick Moynihan of New York and Robert Kerrey of Nebraska, as well as quite a num-

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ber of Republicans. Many of them, particularly those on the Right, take inspiration from the now-legendary Chilean model. Years ago, the government of Chile opened individual accounts for workers and allowed them to invest in a range of stocks and bonds. The plan was successful on many fronts. As José Pinera, the father of the Chilean reforms, wrote recently in the *Wall Street Journal*, "If empowering the common man—turning every worker into a shareholder—were the only benefit of such reform, that would be reason [enough] to convert to individual accounts." In fact, he continued, "the Chilean example gives many more reasons." Thanks in part to these individual accounts, a flood of investment boosted the Chilean economy, the savings rate soared, and Chile became an international success story.

In the past two years, America's privatizers have put forward a number of versions of the Chilean plan. Among the first and best was one devised by Carolyn Weaver of the American Enterprise Institute and the pension consultant Sylvester Schieber, under which more than half of Social Security contributions would move into individual accounts. Senators Judd Gregg and John Breaux have offered another version that would leave in place a higher proportion of the old system of guaranteed benefits, and so, too, with variations, has Senator Phil Gramm.

A somewhat different tack is followed by Martin Feldstein of the National Bureau of Economic Research. The Feldstein plan would leave the current structure untouched, but would create new personal accounts for workers from the hundreds of billions of dollars in income-tax surpluses expected in the coming decade. In much the same way that many employers now kick in to workers' defined-contribution pension plans, the government each year would deposit the equivalent of 2 percent of a worker's earnings into his new account. The worker would be allowed to invest that money in a range of stock and bond funds, just as he now invests his pension or 401(k). Through the miracle of untaxed compound interest, this investment would grow to a handsome level. At retirement, the government, whose money it was to begin with, would reclaim three-quarters of the total and use it to pay out Social Security benefits. The other quarter would be the worker's to keep—and its size would depend on the wisdom of his investments. Much like an attorney working on a contingency-fee basis, the worker would have an enormous incentive to perform well.

Needless to say, objections both technical and philosophical have been raised to all such plans. On the technical side, it is alleged that private accounts are inherently risky, being subject to the wild swings of the market. This argument is actually less persuasive than it might appear. Over the past decades, market returns have repeatedly outperformed investment in government bonds. Ibbotson Associates of Chicago calculates that for the period 1951 to 1993—that is, *before* the boom of the late 1990's—the average annual return of a mix of stocks weighted toward large-capitalization companies was 12.5 percent. Even if we take a longer view, examining the stock market from the period starting in 1930—in other words, a period that includes the Depression and numerous recessions—returns have run many percentage points above those of the government bonds in which Social Security funds currently repose. Rather than have citizens pay further toward a government commitment that government actuaries themselves assure us they cannot honor, say the privatizers, why not give Americans the freedom to manage their own retirement? Younger workers, having nothing to lose, might be particularly receptive to such a major shift in paradigm.

Another consideration has been voiced by those worried about what would happen to the less market-savvy among us. What if a worker fails or otherwise neglects to make his contributions, or allocates his funds to high-risk investments—Ponzi Growth Fund A, as it were? And what is to prevent him from abusing the whole idea of such a fund by blowing the return in one big spending spree upon retirement? After all, Labor Department data show that an astounding 84 percent of workers under 40 who leave their firms fail to "roll over" their 401(k)s, imprudently cashing in their benefits rather than keeping them for retirement.

But these concerns, too, are easily addressed. Under every privatization plan currently mooted in Washington, contributions would not be optional: workers would have to make them, just as they currently must pay payroll taxes. Nor would investors be free to put their money wherever they wished; they would have to choose from a range of carefully monitored mutual funds. Finally, to prevent profligacy at the point of retirement, there is a simple, time-tested device: the old-fashioned annuity, under which seniors would receive their cash in sensible dollops, one month, or even one week, at a time.

IRONICALLY ENOUGH, a stronger objection to the privatization movement might be raised by free-marketeers on the Right than by social-welfare activists on the Left. From a market perspective, the problem is not that the schemes on offer fail to provide sufficient protections; the problem is that a

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true privatization scheme is not on the table, and not in the cards. The plan put forward by Senator Gramm, for example, would "guarantee" some share of the private-sector returns. Other plans—Gregg-Breaux among them—would let government supervise even the "private" IRA's that it creates. Even the Feldstein plan, the best of the lot, sends a mixed message. It "gives" workers their individual accounts, but without truly surrendering claim to them. An individual telephoning Fidelity to tilt "his" account toward bonds, or toward stocks, might feel engaged in an entirely private act of investment, but government, the ultimate guarantor, would also be taking an active interest in that investment.

In other words, a free-marketeer might point out, none of the privatization plans, including Feldstein's, avoids the fundamental hazards, political and practical alike, of a world in which the government plays the stock market. Suppose that the market crashes—as it inevitably will, if only for a time—and citizens panic. Enormous pressure would then be placed on government to honor Social Security's promise by "rescuing" its constituents, and such a "rescue" would inevitably have to precede the market's own recovery. Even the smallest of Social Security bailouts would far outstrip all previous bailouts, including the famous savings-and-loan debacle.

There is equal peril in a strong market performance. Imagine Washington under, say, a Gore administration—that is, one in which the impulse to redistribute revenue for social purposes would hold even greater sway than in today's Washington. Policy-makers would almost certainly find reason to be disturbed by the fact that higher earners have fatter "Feldstein" accounts than lower earners, and would be sorely tempted to restrict the amount wealthy Americans got to claim on retirement so as to free up funds for use elsewhere. In the face of a dire eventuality, like the rise of a new underclass, even an outright raid on such accounts would be hard to resist; does not the money belong to the "American people" as a whole?

IF PRIVATIZATION, as now conceived, would not confer some purist form of autonomy, that, too, is understandable enough: true privatization is politically too radical an experiment to be seriously contemplated. And in a flawed lot, even demi-privatization offers more hope than any of the other proposals on hand.

But what about rescue from a different direction altogether: from, in brief, economic growth? This, after all, was what kept the Ponzi scheme afloat so many times before. Could we avoid all the unpalatable choices before us and jump-start our way out of the present mess by somehow making the tide that floats all boats rise higher and faster?

The answer to the recession of the early 1960's lay in the Kennedy-Johnson cuts in income taxes that enabled all programs, including Social Security, to be expanded. In the face of the economic doldrums of the 1970's, tax cuts were again the answer. The capital-gains cut of the late 1970's and the Reagan cuts of the 80's ensured still another decade of growth. Even though the problems this time around seem far more deep-seated, the temptation is thus strong to say that we can do it again.

The ultimate truth is, we cannot. Tax cuts, no matter how deep, will not square the Social Security circle, or spur enough growth to keep the program from its appointment with demographic destiny. But there is a proximate truth: the right *sorts* of cuts can postpone the dreaded date by five, ten, or even twenty years. Today's American tax burden is the highest in our postwar history; although cosmetic reductions of the kind we have had in recent years will not help, returning to the lower rates of the 1980's probably would. So would removing the numerous constraints that now limit many forms of personal savings.

Given the current hesitancy to push for true privatization, cutting taxes now and returning to Social Security in five years may be, in fact, the wisest course of all. But the likelihood of our embarking on such a course cannot be rated high. So far, even the most market-oriented of our political leaders seem wedded to some combination of compulsory savings and tax *hikes* to protect those already in the system. And that fact alone tells us much about the state of our political culture 60 years after the New Deal.

Through the growth of our economy, the rise of IRA's and 401(k)'s and their progeny, the building of the microchip, and the establishment of a new era of American global dominance, markets have indeed made a deep mark on our national consciousness. So, too, however, has the culture of entitlement; and in the end its mark may be the deeper. To judge by the noise emanating from Washington, changes will come to Social Security. But when they do, they will almost inevitably entail a further expansion of government—justified, no doubt, as a merely temporary and expedient measure. The lesson is the same one we have been taught over and over again in our national political experience: a right, once given, is very hard to take away.

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Racial Preferences: What We Now Know

Stephan Thernstrom & Abigail Thernstrom

SINCE THE late 1960's, leading American colleges and universities have used racial and ethnic criteria to select a significant fraction of their entering classes. And since the late 1960's, increasingly vocal objections have been raised to such policies on grounds of moral and constitutional principle. Until fairly recently, however, relatively little was known about how the process actually worked. Exactly how much weight was given to racial and ethnic considerations in the admissions process? The official line was, not much—but no data were ever provided. What happened to preferentially-admitted students during and after their college years? No one would ever say. Although university and college officials aggressively defended their policies, they did so on the basis of assertion and without supporting facts, or at least without facts they would publicly release.

The ability to keep the files under lock and key began to come to an end, however, with the *Hopwood* litigation that resulted in the 1996 finding by the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals that the law school at the University of Texas had engaged in racial discrimination against whites; with the fight in California that ended in the passage of Proposition 209, forbidding racial preferences in higher education; with a similar initiative in the state of Washington; and with a number of freedom-of-information-act lawsuits. Tantalizing fragments of evidence have trickled out, all suggesting that the weight given to racial and ethnic considerations was in fact extremely substantial, amounting in most cases to a flagrant double standard.

The result is that, today, advocates of preferences have been thrown somewhat on the defensive, and a subtle shift has occurred in their rhetoric. They still insist the policy is just, but increasingly they have come to clinch their case with the trumping argument that it is *effective*. Black students deserve preferences, and they prove their deserts by doing well academically, by going on to successful careers, and by becoming, in the words of a recent study, "the backbone of the emergent black middle class." From this there follows a warning: efforts to dismantle preferential policies will result in severe setbacks for American blacks and hence for the cause of racial and social harmony.

The study that makes this point most vehemently, and from which we have just quoted, is *The Shape of the River: Long-Term Consequences of Considering Race in College and University Admissions.** This book is best understood as a high-level effort to stem the tide of *Hopwood* and Proposition 209. Its authors, William G. Bowen and Derek Bok,

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* Princeton University Press, 384 pp., $24.95.

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certainly cannot complain that their work has been neglected. Although written in gray bureaucratic prose, and crammed with 147 tables and graphs, *The Shape of the River* was an instant news event, hailed by editorial writers and columnists in leading newspapers and magazines as well as by CBS, CNN, and National Public Radio. The *New York Times*, not content with running a full-page story and reprinting excerpts from the work itself, also ringingly endorsed its conclusions in an editorial claiming that the study "provides striking confirmation of the success of affirmative action in opening opportunities and creating a whole generation of black professionals."

But that, indeed, is the question.

IF YOU are inclined to believe that policies are best evaluated by those who design and implement them, William Bowen and Derek Bok are superbly qualified for the task they set themselves. Bowen was provost at Princeton University from 1967 to 1972 and then president until 1988, when he became head of the Mellon Foundation. Bok was dean of the Harvard law school from 1968 to 1971 and then president of Harvard University for twenty years. In *The Shape of the River*, the two men are thus assessing initiatives for which they, more than anyone else at their respective institutions, were responsible.

In an important sense, they are also assessing their own legacies as leaders of American higher education. For what if the evidence they set out to examine were to reveal that preferential admissions policies had *not* achieved their objectives, or even had had unanticipated negative consequences? One might then legitimately ask why Bowen and Bok had buried their heads in the sand for so long—or why, in the many years they had spent in charge of two fabulously wealthy universities, neither had commissioned a careful analysis of what was happening on his watch. But no matter. Although the authors say they "were far from certain what the data would reveal" when they began their study, what the data revealed in the end was their own wisdom in having "worked hard, over more than three decades, to enroll and educate more diverse student bodies."

The data themselves mainly concern the academic performance of approximately 30,000 students who entered one of 28 leading colleges and universities in 1976, and another 32,000 who began their studies in 1989. Of the 28 institutions, 24 were private. The authors divide the schools into three levels of selectivity (called SEL-1, -2, and -3) on the basis of the mean combined SAT scores of their matriculants, with institutions like Princeton, Stanford, Williams, and Yale at the top, places like Columbia, Northwestern, Penn, and Tufts at SEL-2, and, at SEL-3, mainly public schools like the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, Pennsylvania State, and Miami University of Ohio. Much of their analysis is based upon detailed records from just five of these 28 schools, all five of them private.

No doubt for reasons of delicacy, Bowen and Bok eschew the term "preferences." They speak, instead, of "racially-sensitive" admissions policies—policies, they assure us, that take into account a great many factors in addition to race and result in the acceptance of minority students who come well-qualified for academic work. Their data, they claim, show that such preferentially-admitted students do indeed succeed in school; most of them stick it out for four years and collect their diplomas, and an impressive proportion go on to do graduate work and to enter well-paying occupations. They also become unusually active in civic affairs, playing key leadership roles both within the black community and in the larger society.

Especially gratifying to the authors are two additional findings: that the beneficiaries of "racially-sensitive" policies do not feel stigmatized by the special circumstances of their admission, and that these policies have a highly positive effect on *all* students, as shown by the number with friendships across racial lines and the high level of white support for "diversity" in university life.

LET US consider these claims one by one.

It is, to begin with, well established that the SAT scores of black students admitted to many selective colleges and universities are often 200 or more points below those of whites and Asians who are accepted. What this means in practice is that, in any given bracket, blacks will enjoy a significant leg up. Thus, among 1989 applicants to the five private schools studied intensively by Bowen and Bok, only 19 percent of whites with combined SAT scores from 1200 to 1249 were admitted, as against 60 percent of blacks with similar scores; in the next bracket up (1250-1299), 24 percent of whites but 75 percent of blacks were accepted. In these two brackets, then, the black acceptance rate was triple that for whites. In the 1500-or-better category, over a third of whites were turned down while every single black applicant got in.

According to Bowen and Bok, what should impress us about these numbers is not the stark inter-

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racial disproportion they disclose but the fact that, in any single category, neither all the whites nor all the blacks were accepted. For them, this proves that many factors entered into the admissions decisions; race was not the whole story. Of course, what it really proves is just the opposite: race was of overwhelming importance. There is no other explanation for the fact that black applicants with scores around 1200 were nearly as likely to be accepted at Bowen and Bok's five institutions as whites with scores of 1500 or better.

In order to bolster their claim that black students admitted to elite institutions in 1989 had "strong academic credentials," Bowen and Bok make another specious point: their SAT scores were slightly higher than the average for all students who enrolled in these schools *in 1951*. But as Bowen and Bok have ample reason to know, elite colleges in 1951 drew their students from a limited social stratum and had much lower admissions standards. Today, the criteria have changed all around. No track coach today would pursue a high-school miler just because he would have made the varsity in 1951, and only a racial double standard would lead an admissions officer to settle for that era's academic credentials.

Equally strained is still another argument advanced by Bowen and Bok—that three-quarters of the blacks applying to the five selective schools in 1989 scored higher on the SAT than the national average for all white test-takers. That may be so, but the typical white applicant to the five schools in question had scores far above the national average—in the top 8 percent of all test-takers in the verbal part of the SAT and in the top 9 percent in math. As for those actually accepted, they ranked in the top 3-4 percent. When black students with SAT's at the 75th percentile get into schools where the average white or Asian is in the 96th percentile or higher, the special "qualification" that makes the difference is race.

In sum, Bowen and Bok's own data powerfully reinforce the point that "racially-sensitive" admissions involve very dramatic racial double standards. If they did not, the authors would not have to bewail the calamitous consequences they see ensuing from a truly race-blind process. For in one thing Bowen and Bok are certainly correct: removing race as a factor would make a big difference at their 28 elite colleges, and especially at the very top. According to their own estimates, if students had been admitted in 1989 on a race-neutral basis, black enrollment at the first-tier schools would have declined by 73 percent, at the second-tier schools by 52 percent, and at the third-tier schools by 32 percent.

To be sure, these calculations exaggerate somewhat. They assume that test scores are the only variable in admissions, and that is never the case. All institutions of higher learning give some edge to applicants from deprived socioeconomic circumstances, and also apply lower standards for varsity athletes. Both these factors might work to the advantage of lower-scoring African-Americans, thus incidentally leaving in place a racial gap in average SAT scores. Still, uniform academic criteria would unquestionably mean a substantial decline in black admissions at very selective schools (though little or none at institutions with lower requirements).

But that, of course, is precisely what critics of preferences have always maintained: preferences really are preferential.

ONCE ADMITTED, how well do the beneficiaries of racial double standards perform? Bowen and Bok see nothing "disappointing." In their designated schools, almost eight out of ten graduated—double the national average for blacks. At the elite institutions within this elite, nearly nine out of ten collected their diplomas.

At first glance, this does seem to raise serious questions about the theory advanced by critics of preferences—like us—concerning the damaging effects of the "mismatch" between preferential admittees and their peers. But only at first glance. The elite schools, in general, show very impressive *overall* graduation rates, perhaps because the higher you go in the academic hierarchy, the easier the grading. In most first-level schools, what was an F a generation ago is now a C or even a B-minus. At Stanford, the average grade these days is said to be A-minus! What is more, the most prestigious schools, which are also the wealthiest, have the greatest resources for tutoring and counseling.

In addition, the black students attending such schools come from relatively well-educated and affluent families. Although Bowen and Bok scarcely mention it, 64 percent of the African-Americans in their study had at least one parent who graduated from college (among all black youths of college age, the comparable figure is 11 percent), and only a fifth came from families with incomes of less than $22,000 (nationally, half of all African-Americans of college age fall into this category). Colleges like Princeton and Yale admit an even more advantaged element of the black population, and it stands to reason that such privileged youngsters will graduate at much higher rates than their less affluent peers.

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Finally, looking at graduation rates exclusively, as Bowen and Bok do, tells only one part of the story. If we examine the other side of the coin, dropout rates, the picture changes dramatically. Thus, in the authors' 1989 sample, only 6.3 percent of the whites but 20.8 percent of the blacks failed to get a bachelor's degree (from any school). In other words, the black dropout rate from elite schools was 3.3 times the white rate, a much larger differential than the national gap between all black and white dropouts. Furthermore, this racial difference increases with the selectivity of the school: the black-to-white dropout ratio was considerably higher at the top schools than at the second- and third-tier schools.

To focus on the graduation numbers and ignore the dropout picture is like looking at black male employment rather than at black male unemployment. The former figures look pretty good—the racial gap stands at about five percentage points—but black men are two-and-a-half times more likely to be jobless than white men. Just as black unemployment is one of our most important social problems, so the dropout numbers alert us to an educational problem we ignore at our peril.

IF BOWEN and Bok make much of graduation rates and nothing of dropout rates, they also downplay actual classroom performance. Nevertheless, they do admit a startling fact: the cumulative grade-point average of the African-American students at their 28 schools puts them at the 23rd percentile (i.e., in the bottom quarter) of their class.

Even that figure is deceptively rosy. If Bowen and Bok had differentiated between black students admitted regularly and those admitted preferentially, they would likely have found the beneficiaries of preferences doing even worse. As it is, we are not told how many black students made it into the top quarter or the top tenth of their class, how many graduated with honors, or how many made Phi Beta Kappa; in a book stuffed with numbers, the authors turn coy exactly when information is most needed. But if the mean is at the 23rd percentile, not many could have been near the top.

Nor do Bowen and Bok ask whether badly prepared black students show any signs of catching up with their peers over the course of their four years, as proponents of preferences have often claimed they do. Does the stimulating environment of a top-flight school make up for years of inadequate preparation? According to an important recent study by Rogers Elliot and others, no "late-bloomer" effect can be discerned at such schools, no tendency toward convergence in black and white GPA's; but Elliot's study is ignored by Bowen and Bok.

Given the disparity in grade-point averages, it would hardly be surprising to learn that black students with relatively poor academic records feel stigmatized. But Bowen and Bok dismiss this problem, too. According to their survey, most blacks at the 28 colleges reported feeling "satisfied" or "very satisfied." But it is a very long leap from the question asked to the conclusions drawn. Anyone truly interested in the issue of stigmatization would need to ask much more refined and subtle questions than the flat-footed ones posed by Bowen and Bok. Even then, honest answers would be hard to come by, especially in the case of schools as pleasant as these to attend and of students as fortunate as these to have been accepted at them.

Once again, though, a hint of the real picture emerges from a statistic in *The Shape of the River* itself. Crediting "diversity" with bringing about an impressively high number of interracial friendships, Bowen and Bok adduce the fact that 56 percent of whites in the 1989 cohort said they knew two or more black classmates "well"; moreover, the number of interracial friendships rises modestly with the selectivity of the school. What they neglect to tell us is the proportion of college students *generally* who have friends of another race—and, more tellingly, how their figures compare with those for black-white friendships in American society at large.

As we pointed out in *America in Black and White*, those figures have risen spectacularly over the past three decades. Fully 86 percent of all white adults in a 1997 national survey said they had black friends, and 73 percent of those surveyed in 1994 said that they had "good friends" who were African-American. By these standards, the elite schools are hardly in the proud vanguard of progress. To the contrary, they are lagging woefully behind.

A proper subject of inquiry is why this should be so. Might it—the hypothesis is irresistible—have something to do with the discriminatory standards by which blacks are admitted to elite schools?

THE FINAL two items in our catalogue have to do with the post-collegiate careers of the students in Bowen and Bok's sample. Many, they claim, go on to "top-rated professional schools." Graduate training or no, moreover, their elite cohort now forms the "backbone" of the expanding black middle class.

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According to Bowen and Bok, some 40 percent of the black graduates of their 28 schools obtained professional or doctoral degrees, a figure slightly higher than the figure for whites from the same schools and dramatically higher than the 8 percent for all black college graduates. Furthermore, blacks from elite colleges were far more likely than their white classmates to attend the most prestigious law, medical, and business schools.

None of this is in the least surprising. It is, rather, still further evidence of the extent to which race-conscious admissions policies at the undergraduate level are carried over in race-conscious admissions policies at the graduate level. In her recent study of students who began law school in 1991, Linda F. Wightman estimated that, if the decision had been made purely on the basis of college grades and LSAT scores, a total of just 24 African-Americans would have been admitted that year to one of the eighteen best law schools—a school, that is, in the top 10 percent in the nation. Instead, 420 black students got in. These elite law schools, in other words, had to put an even heavier thumb on the scale than did the Yales, Dukes, and Stanfords that are supposedly doing such an effective job of training black undergraduates.

Anyone familiar with the law-school scene today knows, moreover, that disproportionate numbers of black graduates fail the bar examinations, which are of course graded on a color-blind basis. Not a word about bar exams appears in *The Shape of the River*, even though it is the chief focus of the Wightman study (cited repeatedly by the authors). For the record, Wightman found that more than a fifth of black law students who owed their admission to racial preferences failed to graduate; even worse, 27 percent of those who got through law school were unable to pass a bar exam within three years, a failure rate nearly triple that for blacks who were admitted under regular standards, and almost seven times the white failure rate.*

EVEN LESS persuasive, and even more demagogic, is Bowen and Bok's reading of the evidence on black economic advancement. Without race-conscious policies at the elite universities, they warn, there would be no black middle class. This, too, is nonsense.

For one thing, the numbers simply do not add up. Only 13,784 African-Americans were among the 300,000-plus students who entered any SEL-1, -2, or -3 four-year college in the United States in 1976. It can be estimated that just 8,800 of these actually graduated, some portion of whom would have been admitted to these schools without any racial preferences. A group so minuscule could hardly form the "backbone" of a black middle class that by any reasonable definition includes more than ten million people.

Nor is it correct that, without the elite schools, the black middle class would shrivel away. As we pointed out earlier, the authors' own evidence shows clearly that these schools are educating young men and women who were born into that class (among the 1989 black enrollees, only 14 percent came from low-income families). They may typically attain higher socioeconomic status than their parents, but it was their parents who made it into the middle class in the first place, and very few of them did so by attending an elite school.

This last is a crucial point. In an early chapter, Bowen and Bok chronicle some of the social and economic progress made by blacks since World War II—much of it (they fail to note) prior to the institution of preferential policies. To assume that preferences account for subsequent gains is to commit the classic fallacy of *post hoc ergo propter hoc*. Once again the evidence tells a different story.

The number of African-Americans in Congress, boast Bowen and Bok, rose from 4 to 41 between 1965 and 1995. This is a remarkable shift; but less than a fifth of the congressional black caucus in 1995 had attended an elite institution. Nor is this an isolated example. In a list of the top 50 black federal officials recently compiled by the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, only a handful had gone to an elite school. Similarly with black officers in the U.S. Army, and similarly, too, with the 44 black winners of MacArthur Foundation "genius" awards between 1981 and 1998, three-quarters of whom attended institutions that were basically nonselective. Although studies of the educational background of black business leaders are unavailable, it is hard to believe the picture there would be any different.

Particularly egregious in this connection is Bowen and Bok's failure—disinclination?—to look closely at the data from historically black colleges. The original material collected for their study included records from Howard University, Morehouse College, Spelman College, and Xavier University of Louisiana. These four institutions alone, among the best of the nation's several dozen black colleges and universities, present intriguing analytical possibilities unexplored by the authors.

* See Stephan Thernstrom's "The Scandal of the Law Schools," in the December 1997 COMMENTARY.

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The four are not very selective by national standards. They accept a majority of their applicants, who in turn have median SAT scores at or only slightly above the national average. But some of the young men and women who choose to be educated at a place like Howard or Morehouse have qualifications very much like those of their contemporaries who get into a place like Duke or Michigan. It would be interesting to know whether they derive a real benefit from attending a school at which their academic skills are about average for their class rather than far below. Is it merely coincidental that historically black colleges, which account for only a sixth of total black college enrollment, produced 43 percent of the 1995 congressional black caucus, 39 percent of the black officers in the U.S. Army according to a 1996 survey, and fully a quarter of black MacArthur "genius" grantees in the last two decades? Or that, of the ten undergraduate institutions responsible for the greatest number of blacks who went on to earn Ph.D's in the years 1992-96, nine were black colleges?

One early graduate of Morehouse College was the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. Bowen and Bok mention him—but not his college—to support their argument that quantitative measures of academic skills are of limited help in predicting "which applicants will contribute most in later life to their professions and their communities." Despite having scored in the bottom half of all test-takers on the verbal portion of the Graduate Records Examination, Dr. King, they write, became "one of the great orators of this century." Yes, he did. But what is the lesson? If a regime of preferences and academic double standards had been established a few decades earlier, an underqualified Martin Luther King, Jr. might well have been admitted to Princeton and then to the Yale Divinity School. Would this have been better for him? For us? Only someone besotted with the inestimable worth of a Princeton or Yale degree can imagine that the answer is necessarily yes.

The central issue explored in *The Shape of the River* is whether racially-preferential policies "work." The authors are convinced they do; the evidence suggests otherwise—unless by "work" we mean only that, whatever their consequences, these policies do indeed extend a benefit to one group at the expense of others. By this criterion, however, many a policy has "worked." When the colleges and universities of the South refused to admit any black students, no matter how qualified, that, too, "worked": the institutions remained all-white. The same can be said of the "religiously-sensitive" admissions policies that prevailed at Princeton, Harvard, and other schools that once had Jewish quotas; they certainly succeeded in keeping the number of Jewish students dramatically down.

But that brings us to the exceedingly perverse moral calculus that underlies Bowen and Bok's defense of racial preferences. They believe fervently in Justice Blackmun's dictum (in the 1978 *Bakke* decision) that "in order to get beyond racism, we must first take race into account." Thus, they see no problem if, for the sake of "diversity," a school that "needs" more black students accepts less-qualified blacks while turning down better-qualified whites and Asians. The assumption that it is morally legitimate to distribute benefits to individuals on the basis of ascribed group characteristics goes unquestioned.

Moreover, they do not say how much "diversity" is enough. African-Americans were just 6.7 percent of the students entering Bowen and Bok's elite colleges in 1989, or barely half the "share" they represented in that year's high-school graduating class. In other words, by national standards, blacks remained woefully underrepresented. Why then are Bowen and Bok content with today's racial mix? Since they appear to believe that students with SAT's under 1,000 can do perfectly well at the most selective colleges in America, why do they not criticize the schools in their study for *rejecting* four out of five black applicants with such low scores?

And what about the harm done to others? Bowen and Bok argue that racial preferences have only the slightest negative effect on any individual white. The gains are concentrated on a group small enough to feel the boost; the costs are paid by a group so large as to render the pain trivial for any one of its members. White resentment, they claim, is like the annoyance many drivers feel at parking spots reserved for the handicapped. Just as those spaces keep very few of the able-bodied from the choice spots in front of stores, so too only a few whites are kept out of Yale on account of racial preferences.

Quite apart from their troubling analogy between black students and the "crippled," it is not only whites who are excluded when blacks are admitted to schools by racial preferences. Throughout this book, Bowen and Bok avoid almost any mention of Asians, a group that makes up less than 4 percent of the U.S. population but, without the benefit of double standards, already forms a vital presence on elite campuses. If preferences were to end, the Asian presence would undoubtedly grow

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larger—as it has already done after race-neutral admissions went into effect at the University of California. Is it fair to keep Asians back in order to benefit blacks, a group that, as it happens, outnumbers them three-to-one in American society?

In fact, the authors' argument can be used to defend any policy that benefits a specific collectivity at the expense of some arbitrarily defined majority. Six out of seven elementary-school teachers today are women. If, in order to get more male role models in the classroom, we were to cut the salaries of each female teacher by 10 percent and give the money in the form of bonuses to men, the pain felt by any individual woman would undoubtedly be less than the pleasure each man would get from his bigger salary. The same logic would also, absurdly, justify policies benefiting the rich at the expense of the poor—a comparatively very large group among whom the costs would be very widely dispersed.

But, of course, it does not matter a bit whether the class being discriminated against is a narrow or a broad one; it is individuals who suffer from discriminatory treatment. Americans used to know this, and it is particularly disquieting to hear otherwise from, among others, a former president of Princeton, a school that enrolled very few Jews and no blacks until long after most of the Ivies had opened their doors wide to members of both groups.

FOR A generation now, preferences in higher education have served as a pernicious palliative, deflecting our attention from the real problem: the yawning racial gap in educational performance among elementary- and secondary-school pupils. As long as the average black high-school senior reads at the eighth-grade level, efforts to engineer parity in college, let alone in the legal and medical professions, are doomed to failure. Worse, such efforts perpetuate (when they do not deepen) the very stereotypes they are professedly designed to eradicate. If they can be said to "work" at all, it is only as a pretense: the universities pretend to be redressing historic inequities, the beneficiaries of their patronizing largesse pretend to be competing on an equal footing.

The damage done by this destructive arrangement has, haltingly and at long last, come to be confronted by the courts and by the voters. It would be the ultimate irony if its last defenders turned out to be the self-appointed guardians of intellectual and moral standards in American life.

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OBSERVATIONS

Can We Prevent Genocide?

Gary Rosen

WHEN PRESIDENT Reagan signed the Genocide Convention into American law a little more than a decade ago, he did so over the objections of many stalwart conservatives. In their view, the United Nations-sponsored treaty—formally known as the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide—was irredeemably tainted by the murderous deeds of its Communist signatories, from Albania and the People's Republic of China to Vietnam and the Soviet Union.

Reagan saw things differently. Determined to wage battle against Communism on every front, but perhaps most of all ideologically, his administration argued that America could no longer afford to stand apart from a solemn international pledge to resist the wholesale destruction of peoples. As UN Ambassador Jeane J. Kirkpatrick told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, "The Soviets and others hostile to the United States have long focused on [our] failure to ratify the convention as part of their anti-American propaganda." By going on record against the most egregious form of human-rights violation, she contended, the U.S. could at once honor its deepest principles and further its obvious strategic interests.

That this reassuring equation might soon dissolve occurred to no one at the time—but dissolve it did. By the early 1990's, the cold war had receded into history, and the United States and its allies, fresh from a rousing victory in the Gulf war, found themselves having to deal with the unwelcome intrusion onto the world scene—and into their foreign policies—of instances of potential or actual genocide. What Western interests were threatened in the killing fields of Rwanda and Bosnia? And, if interests there were, at what cost could they have been defended?

These are the questions that haunt two important new books—Philip Gourevitch's *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families: Stories from Rwanda** and Roger Cohen's *Hearts Grown Brutal: Sagas of Sarajevo*.† Indeed, for all the particulars that separate the two cases, Gourevitch (a staff writer for the *New Yorker*) and Cohen (the former Balkan bureau chief of the *New York Times*) have composed remarkably kindred accounts of mass ethnic slaughter. Both limn a complex historical and political backdrop while filling the foreground with the stories of ordinary people whose lives disappeared into the mayhem. More tellingly, both write with the indignant fury of journalistic prosecutors. The West, they charge—and the United States most of all—was complicit in the butchery. Repelled by the violence and disorder, the world's richest and most powerful nations chose to look the other way when the obligation to act was plain.

THOUGH RWANDA has long been divided between Tutsis and Hutus, Philip Gourevitch reports in *We Wish to Inform You . . .*, the boundary between the two groups is hard-

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† Random House, 523 pp., $27.95.

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ly self-evident, and is not even best described as ethnic. Alike in language and religion, and mingled through centuries of intermarriage, they are more akin to castes or classes. By tradition, Tutsis were herdsmen and aristocrats, while the far more numerous Hutus tilled the soil, often as vassals. More fatefully for Rwanda, according to Gourevitch, this political and economic pecking order was reinforced by a popular belief in certain "physical archetypes." Hutus were generally—if often wrongly—thought of as shorter and darker-skinned than the supposedly fine-featured Tutsis.

On the eve of Rwandan independence from Belgium in 1962, the Hutus finally lashed out against the Tutsi elite, who had extended their privileges under the colonial regime. It was the first wide-scale political violence in Rwanda's history, and it would be repeated in the years ahead by the dictatorial Hutu regime, with Tutsi deaths at times reaching well into the thousands. Such massacres abated under Juvénal Habyarimana, the Hutu general who took power in 1973 and chose to keep down the Tutsi minority more peaceably through a comprehensive program of state-sponsored discrimination. By 1990, a million Tutsis had fled Rwanda, nearly half of them to neighboring Uganda, the launching pad in that year for an invasion by a Tutsi-dominated guerrilla group calling itself the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF).

As Gourevitch is at pains to emphasize, the war itself was not the source of the massive bloodletting that would ensue. To the contrary, it was only after President Habyarimana reached a tense accommodation with the RPF in the summer of 1993 that anti-Tutsi hysteria within Rwanda began to mount. Nor was this a spontaneous development. Since the outbreak of hostilities, Habyarimana's inner circle had worked assiduously to demonize not only the RPF but its "accomplices" within Rwanda, by which it meant all Tutsis. Lists were compiled, Hutu youth militias were organized, and the government-backed newspaper and radio hammered away at a single sanguinary theme, neatly summarized in a "commandment" issued by the effort's chief propagandist: "Hutus must stop having mercy on the Tutsis."

It was apparently "Hutu Power," as this movement fashioned itself, that lay behind the shooting-down of Habyarimana's jet as he returned to the Rwandan capital on April 6, 1994; he was not anti-Tutsi *enough*. In a matter of hours, the genocidal machinery that had been so meticulously prepared was set in motion. Machete-wielding Hutus fanned out across the country, instructed to exterminate every last one of the "cockroaches."

More astonishing perhaps than the sheer human energy required for the slaughter that followed—killing someone with a machete, Gourevitch points out, is slow, arduous work—was the readiness of so many tens of thousands of ordinary people to take part in it, and the close relations they often had with their victims:

> Hutus young and old rose to the task. Neighbors hacked neighbors to death in their homes, and colleagues hacked colleagues to death in their workplaces. Doctors killed their patients, and schoolteachers killed their pupils.

Gourevitch does not pretend to be able to explain such intimate and wanton cruelty. Greed, passivity, superstition, drunkenness—these and other ordinary vices played a part, and were happily exploited by the captains of Hutu Power. But in the end, he writes, "the decimation had been utterly gratuitous."

And it *was* a decimation. In the course of a mere 100 days, by which time the RPF had swept in and taken power from them, the Hutus of Rwanda murdered at least a tenth of the country's population—by conservative estimates, some 800,000 Tutsi men, women, and children.

THE FIRST entry in the dense chronology that Roger Cohen appends to *Hearts Grown Brutal* is 395 C.E., the year in which the Roman emperor Theodosius died and his realm was split into East and West at the Drina River in present-day Bosnia. From this musty bit of history, Cohen reminds us in his rich narrative, much else in the Balkans flows: the division of the Southern Slavs into Catholic Croats and Orthodox Serbs, the centuries of struggle in the region between the Hapsburg empire and the expanding Ottoman Turks, the eventual rise of long-suppressed nationalist sentiments, and the various efforts in this century to forge a Yugoslav nation in the face of these "balkanizing" pressures.

Yet, when it comes to identifying the causes of the war that engulfed Bosnia from 1992 to 1995, Cohen is no antiquarian. It is not that he discounts the power of grievances and aspirations rooted in the past. Indeed, Serbia's aggression would have been unthinkable had Belgrade not been gripped by vivid images of resurgent "Turks" and reborn Croatian fascists, of glorious medieval kingdoms and ignominious medieval defeats. But as Cohen stresses, these were hardly the unprompted expressions of the Serbian mind. They were carefully sown ideas, cynically propagated in the service of political and territorial ambition.

In this, of course, the arch-villain was the Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic. A leading Communist functionary as Tito's Yugoslavia began to disintegrate in the late 1980's, Milosevic wasted no time in raising the banner of what Cohen describes as a "paranoid, self-pitying, and aggressive" Serbian nationalism, or in transforming himself into the embodiment of a revived "fatherland." Serbia, Milosevic declared, had to be made whole, its people brought under direct Serbian rule whether they

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lived in the Albanian-dominated province of Kosovo, in Croatia, or—most ominously—in Bosnia.

Bosnia, Cohen wistfully observes, was the one place in the former Yugoslavia where Muslims, Serbs, and Croats had managed to build something of a shared existence. A third of all marriages there were mixed, and, in Sarajevo in particular, a proud cosmopolitan ethos prevailed. Nevertheless, in Bosnia as in the Croatia of Franjo Tudjman, a politics based on ethnicity arose, drawing strength from the threat posed by Serbian chauvinism. Bosnia's largely secular Muslims were soon united behind the more religiously-minded Alija Izetbegovic, a leader whom Cohen portrays as hopelessly unprepared for the Serbian onslaught that his own brand of nationalism would unleash.

No sooner had Bosnia declared independence in the spring of 1992 than the Bosnian Serbs, led by Radovan Karadzic but armed and directed by Belgrade, were on the march against the country's newfound "mujahedin" and "jihad warriors." Sarajevo was quickly encircled by heavy artillery. Within three months, 70 percent of Bosnia—an internationally recognized state, it should be noted—was in Serbian hands.

As for the one million Bosnian Muslims whose towns and villages were overtaken by this campaign of "ethnic cleansing," some were herded toward areas held by their own government, others into enclaves where they remained at the mercy of the Serbs. Muslim women were raped by the thousands as a matter of policy, and the most unfortunate of the men ended up in concentration camps like Susica, Omarska, and Keraterm, where they were kept in unspeakably inhumane conditions, tortured, and often summarily executed. "A ghoulish savagery rather than cold-blooded efficiency drove the boozy killing," Cohen writes. "Ears and sexual organs were sliced off; some people were beaten to death."

Still, for all their sadistic sloppiness, the Serbs had gone far in securing "Greater Serbia." By the time the Dayton peace agreement was signed in 1995, some 200,000 people were dead in Bosnia, the overwhelming majority of them Muslims, including over 18,000 who had simply disappeared in Serbian custody. In the half of the country retained by Serbian separatists as a spoil of war, scarcely a "Turk" remained.

RWANDA AND Bosnia are vastly different places, not least in the degree to which they have figured in the affairs of other nations. Rwanda has never been more than an occasionally troublesome third-world outpost, while Bosnia (or Yugoslavia, in any event) has played a part in virtually every confrontation among the major powers in this century. It is thus all the more striking to see how similarly the West responded to the ethnic carnage that unfolded in these disparate corners of the world. As both Gourevitch and Cohen amply document, evasion and cowardice were the order of the day.

In the case of Rwanda, the designs of Hutu Power were known as early as January 1994, when Major General Roméo Dallaire, the Canadian commander of the UN force stationed there to monitor a peace accord between Habyarimana and the RPF, informed New York that he had received disturbing intelligence from a highly placed source in the Hutu military. In a fax to Kofi Annan, then the chief of UN peacekeeping operations, Dallaire gave a detailed description of the advance planning for the extermination and relayed the Hutu informant's claim that "in twenty minutes his [own] personnel could kill up to a thousand Tutsis." In keeping with the "mandate" of the UN's mission, however, Dallaire was instructed to share the information with the (Hutu) Rwandan government.

With the onset of the massacres three months later, bureaucratic obtuseness gave way to diplomatic damage control. Having just reaped the bitter fruit of U.S. intervention in Somalia, the Clinton administration did everything in its power to forestall and limit UN action. State Department spokesmen engaged in shameless hair-splitting about the precise meaning of the term "genocide" and whether it described events in Rwanda. For their part, the French happily parroted the propaganda of their Francophone Hutu clients and, with the reluctant blessing of the UN Security Council, mounted a military expedition to Rwanda, pledging impartiality but in fact briefly extending the life of the murderous regime.

Worse perhaps was the "humanitarian" intervention that followed the victory of the Tutsi-led RPF. Well-provisioned UN refugee camps in Zaire soon became new bases of operation for the Hutu *genocidaires*, whose displacement from the scene of their crimes—and occasional harsh treatment at the hands of the RPF—transformed *them* into victims in the eyes of much of the international community. The world had seemingly concluded that the catastrophe in Rwanda was, as Gourevitch writes, "a kind of natural disaster—Hutus and Tutsis simply doing what their natures dictated."

In the case of Bosnia, Western involvement was a more complex and longstanding affair—and yet the pattern was much the same. The bulk of the Serbs' crimes occurred between April and October 1992, a period that, to the misfortune of Bosnia's Muslims, coincided with the reelection effort of President Bush, who no doubt would have been disinclined to intervene even under less delicate circumstances. By the end of the summer of 1992, as the damning intelligence began to mount, administration officials made a conscious choice to avert their eyes. Queried about the possibility of genocide in Bosnia, Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence S. Eagleburger declared, "On the

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basis of what we have so far, it's best to say the evidence is unpleasant conditions."

Though candidate Bill Clinton protested this policy of inaction, speaking of the "high cost of remaining silent and paralyzed in the face of genocide," his own support for air strikes against the Serbs and for repeal of the UN arms embargo on Yugoslavia evaporated soon after he took office. The new policy imperative was "containing the conflict"—and avoiding American entanglement. A situation that had once seemed black-and-white to the administration grew steadily grayer. The mutual hatreds in Bosnia were "centuries old," announced the President, while Secretary of State Warren Christopher cited "atrocities on all sides."

Predictably, it fell to the blue-helmeted peacekeepers of the United Nations to fill this policy vacuum. But as Cohen points out, there was no peace to keep—just an ongoing war in which the UN's absurd "neutrality" dictated that it treat alike the besieged Bosnians and the occupying Serbs. Time and again, the presence of this "humanitarian" mission failed to deter Serbian aggression, culminating in the tragic fall of the UN's "safe areas" for Bosnian Muslims, where the threat of NATO airstrikes proved empty in the face of the Serbs' readiness to take the hapless UN soldiers hostage.

READING THESE eloquent jeremiads is, needless to say, a most dispiriting exercise. Though each book has its faults—*We Wish to Inform You* . . . strives too hard for literary profundity, *Hearts Grown Brutal* bogs down at times in narrative detail—both Gourevitch and Cohen succeed admirably in fusing together the excruciating plight of individuals and the sorry spectacle of the West's response. For the United States, they convincingly show, the refusal to acknowledge these human catastrophes from the start, much less to use force to stop them, was a gross dereliction of its unique responsibilities in the post-cold-war world.

What would have justified risking American blood and treasure to rescue Rwanda and Bosnia? Here neither Gourevitch nor Cohen seriously quarrels with a key point of the policy-makers they call on the carpet. For the West, they acknowledge, there was little in the way of interest, at least as it is conventionally understood, at stake in Central Africa or the Balkans. "As far as the political, military, and economic interests of the world's powers go," Gourevitch concedes, Rwanda "might as well be Mars." As for the nearer planet of Bosnia, Cohen dutifully rehearses the case a foreign-policy realist might have made for intervention, citing in particular the risk of nationalistic upheavals throughout post-Communist Eastern Europe; but, as he plainly recognizes, the argument is weak in retrospect. To this day, in seeming vindication of those who argued that the nonconfrontational policy of the West was enough to contain the Bosnian conflict, such disorder has yet to materialize.

What remains, of course, is the most important, if most problematic, aspect of the case for intervening against genocide—namely, moral obligation. In this regard, Gourevitch takes a strangely legalistic turn, relying above all on an exaggerated account of the commitments entailed by the Genocide Convention. It bears repeating, however, that even in the eyes of some of its most ardent supporters, the Convention was never much more than a symbol, a statement of principle with no real teeth. Its most severe provisions concern punishing the perpetrators of genocide after the fact, and then not even by military means but through legal action. Though Gourevitch chides the Clinton administration for declaring that the treaty only "enables" but does not require preventive action against genocide, this in fact would seem to be the case.

Cohen comes much closer to the necessary moral reasoning, if in a somewhat scattershot way. "Like America, Bosnia had been a multiethnic state," he writes. "It was dismembered through ideologies of ethnic hatred that flouted the American idea." Moreover, when the U.S. chose to ignore such open defiance of the most fundamental of human rights, it was being untrue not simply to itself but also to the world's expectations of it. As he properly notes, "America still personifies the confidence necessary to draw a distinction between right and wrong and then fight for it."

To complete these thoughts, and to challenge the destructive dichotomy that has so often guided American foreign policy since the end of the cold war, Cohen might usefully have added that the U.S. has a profound and ongoing *interest* in defending its principles. This hardly requires us to employ our military might in remedying every political wrong we observe in the world. But it does give us an inescapable stake in preventing genocide, a crime whose very existence is an affront to the universal claims upon which our own political system is based.

THE LANGUAGE of interest, however, even when properly moralized, is not how Gourevitch and Cohen wish to discuss genocide. Interest implies the possibility of compromise or balance, and both writers seem determined to operate from moral absolutes.

Neither hesitates, for example, to compare the events about which he writes with Hitler's war against the Jews of Europe. Gourevitch muses about the hypocrisy of the slogan, "Never Again," and reports that in Rwanda, the dead "accumulated at nearly three times the rate of Jewish dead during the Holocaust." In Serb-controlled Bosnia, Cohen for his part writes, it was possible to see "images seemingly lifted whole from Treblinka" and to find instances of what Primo Levi, in re-

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counting the barbarity of Auschwitz, termed "useless violence."

Yet, with the Holocaust so explicitly in the background, it is difficult to resist the urge to rank and grade catastrophes—and when it comes to genocide, Hitler's Germany is a tough act to follow. Yes, Rwanda's Tutsis were entirely undeserving of their fate; but there is no denying their historic role atop an oppressive colonial regime and their association with a sympathetic army nearby. For what conceivable wrong or threat did Europe's Jews perish? Yes, the Serbs consigned thousands of Muslim men to concentration camps. But how often were the Nazis so discriminating as to spare Jewish women and children from that fate?

None of this is to gainsay the horror of the events to which Gourevitch and Cohen give vivid witness. But they do not seem sufficiently aware of how high a standard they set for themselves when they prompt comparisons to the Holocaust. At the same time, one wonders why they would wish to recall by implication the Allied response to the murder of Europe's Jews, a chapter of World War II history that is hardly the stuff from which a present-day crusader against genocide can draw inspiration. If the West, even when fully mobilized for war, so signally failed the Jews, why would one expect anything better for beleaguered Tutsis and Bosnian Muslims at a time of unprecedented peace and prosperity?

OF A piece with their rhetorical appeals to the Holocaust—and more serious from a practical standpoint—is the failure of both Gourevitch and Cohen to deal candidly with the likely costs of the policies they endorse. Each contemplates scenarios under which the West could have taken a far more muscular stand, but neither acknowledges the loss of Western lives that would almost certainly have followed. Situations of such unconditional evil, they seem to suggest, require unconditional responses.

Thus, Gourevitch tells us, just two weeks after the genocide in Rwanda began, the UN's General Dallaire declared that, given a free hand, he could bring a quick end to the anti-Tutsi pogrom with a force of 5,000 well-armed soldiers. "No military analyst whom I've heard of has ever questioned [Dallaire's] judgment," Gourevitch writes, "and a great many have confirmed it." But how dangerous an operation would this have been? After all, ten Belgian peacekeepers had already been killed by this point. And, considering the likelihood of French opposition to such a mission, could it have been accomplished without direct American involvement? On these matters, Gourevitch is silent.

As for Bosnia, Cohen is rightly impressed by the success in 1995—three years into the war—of NATO's first concerted bombing and artillery attacks against Serbian positions. But, as he himself suggests, the resulting cooperativeness of the Serbs had much to do with war-weariness and the satisfaction of most of their territorial claims. Earlier in the war, the success of such an effort would likely have depended on the active participation of soldiers on the ground. Cohen suggests that "limited force" would have sufficed, and in support he cites the claim by the Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic that 10,000 strategically placed NATO troops could have brought an early end to his campaign. Granting all this, what might such a confrontation have meant in terms of Western casualties? Cohen justly derides the "zero-risk, zero-body-bag doctrine" that now holds sway at the Pentagon—but he does not answer the question.

POSING SUCH concerns is not tantamount to excusing Western inaction in Rwanda and Bosnia. But it does point to limits, and an appreciation for limits is precisely where Cohen and Gourevitch fall short. Swept along by the moral urgency of their cause, they neglect to reckon with the one political consideration—military risk—that most obviously stood in the way of intervention in both Rwanda and Bosnia.

This is made all the more regrettable by the fact that both books lay the groundwork for just the sort of cold-eyed assessment on which a decision to intervene might responsibly have been made. In the first place, Gourevitch and Cohen show how thoroughly dishonest and self-serving were the claims of those Westerners determined to make military action look pointless. The *context* of genocide in Rwanda and Bosnia may indeed have been "ancient tribal hatreds" and "centuries of strife," but its immediate *sources*—bloodthirsty political movements with identifiable programs and leaders—were hardly so elusive or irresistible.

Nor was it the case, as some Western officials maintained, that the Tutsis and Bosnian Muslims were no less guilty of atrocities than their persecutors. By comparison with its Hutu Power foes, the Rwandese Patriotic Front was a model of self-restraint, determined to work with moderate Hutus and seemingly earnest in its pledge to transcend Rwanda's ethnically polarized past. The Bosnian Muslims also followed a notably moderate course. For all the stridency that their nationalism assumed at times, they never based their own security and well-being on the annihilation of their Serbian neighbors.

What Gourevitch and Cohen fail to stress, however, is that not only were there good guys and bad guys in Rwanda and Bosnia, but the good guys were capable, or at least potentially so, of fending for themselves. Unlike the Jews of Hitler's Europe, neither the Tutsis nor the Bosnian Muslims were without resources for self-defense; they simply lacked the necessary time to

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mobilize them. Even a temporary setback to the aggressors would have been of invaluable service in gaining them that time.

In fact, if the West—but preeminently the United States—had chosen to mount a forceful campaign on their behalf, there is every reason to believe that these would-be victims could themselves have averted the worst of the slaughter. In Rwanda, the RPF undoubtedly would have routed the forces of Hutu Power still more quickly than it eventually did. In Bosnia, a pause in the Serbian offensive would have given President Izetbegovic a chance to reverse his nation's woeful inattention to military preparation and to turn its army into the effective fighting force that it would later become. In neither country was a "quagmire" for Western troops necessarily in the cards. A decisive but relatively brief engagement might well have been enough to stabilize the situation on the ground.

Even so circumscribed a Western aim would hardly have eliminated the possibility of serious casualties. But at least it would have been a starting point for a U.S. President determined to show that America's stake in the affairs of other countries is not reducible to its own economic and military well-being.

Had George Bush or Bill Clinton been such a President, he would have faced a difficult assignment in explaining to the public why the lives of U.S. soldiers were worth endangering for so abstract an interest as America's commitment to certain fundamental rights. Still, such a case just might have succeeded. American pride and self-respect, not to mention simple humanitarian goodwill, are not resources to be underestimated. But neither are they so boundless as to rule out the need for the sort of sober, practical deliberation that one seeks in vain in Philip Gourevitch's and Roger Cohen's impassioned accounts.

The Master of Drip

Michael J. Lewis

WHAT CAN be more peculiar than the reputation of Jackson Pollock, familiar to the public not so much for his paintings as for how he painted them? None of his canvases, not even *Autumn Rhythm* (1950), regarded as a masterpiece of modern art, is as famous as the photographs of the artist at work, especially those taken by Hans Namuth in the summer of 1950. These are the essential images of Pollock: striding impetuously around a canvas spread upon his studio floor, pouring, flinging, and drooling paint across it in a kind of existential fury. And this, as well, is the irony of Pollock. The American painter who aspired to make an art that was a pure aesthetic experience, purged of all subject matter and narrative content, is notorious for the most scandalous narrative of all, the narrative of a painter who did not paint.

The recent Jackson Pollock retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), the first since 1967, partook richly of this irony.* Curated by Kirk Varnedoe, the show comprised over 150 paintings, drawings, and sculptures, spread out in a spare, spacious installation that occupied seventeen of MoMA's galleries. But augmenting the works

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* "Jackson Pollock" was on view at the Museum of Modern Art from November 1, 1998 to February 2, 1999. It travels to the Tate Gallery, London, March 11 to June 6, 1999. The catalogue, generously supplemented with full-sized details of the paintings, is by Kirk Varnedoe with Pepe Karmel, Museum of Modern Art, 336 pp., $35.00.

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themselves was the Namuth documentary series of 1950 as well as a crowd-pleasing, full-scale reconstruction of Pollock's cramped Long Island studio. In addition to the customary scholarly symposium and inevitable website, there was also an anthology of jazz music for sale, culled from Pollock's own record collection.

There could be no mistaking the meaning of the orchestrated publicity, or of the fact that the show was timed roughly to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the *Life* magazine profile that made Pollock a national figure and asked, only half-seriously, "Is he the greatest living painter in the United States?" Varnedoe, after all, is the same curator who a few years ago gave us "High and Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture," and it was only fitting that this inevitably somewhat winking show should self-consciously mix the high modernist championed by austere art critics like Clement Greenberg with the sullen, hard-drinking delinquent celebrated by the middlebrow *Time* and *Life*.

Still, at its heart, the exhibition itself was quite conservative, a strictly chronological overview that followed the neat tripartite structure of Pollock's own life—wilderness in the 30's, achievement in the 40's, dissolution in the 50's—and unfolded in a stately linear adagio. One did not need to read the wall labels to understand that Pollock's career had something of the arc of a meteor, ascending slowly, flaring most brightly in the penultimate gallery—where the epic canvases of 1949 and 1950 were hung—and then burning itself out before crashing in the 1956 car accident that claimed his life.

BORN IN 1912 in Cody, Wyoming, Jackson Pollock had a childhood reminiscent of that of Frank Lloyd Wright, another American artist who would become a household name. Here was the same jack-of-all-trades father, trundling his family from state to state and job to job before finally disappearing from view; here was the same protective mother; and here, too, was something of the same religious background, in Pollock's case a Calvinism that found no outlet in organized faith but would be expressed through deep-seated cultural attitudes—most notably in an insistence on seeing his painting as labor.

Although in later life Pollock would play the part of a barroom brawler in cowboy boots, he actually grew up in Riverside, California—near Los Angeles—where he attended a high school for manual arts and developed a California-style interest in theosophy and occult mysticism: Varnedoe calls this his "soft spot for mumbo-jumbo." Two older brothers became artists and moved to New York; in 1930, Pollock, with more ambition but less ability, followed.

His apprenticeship as an artist was neatly bisected: five years learning to paint like Thomas Hart Benton, and just as many trying to unlearn what he had been taught. At the time, Benton (1889-1975) was America's most famous artist, the feisty champion of a defiantly anti-modernist (and anti-capitalist) movement named Regionalism that celebrated rural and small-town America. He quickly became something of a surrogate father to Pollock, opening his home and family and bailing him out of jail when necessary. From him Pollock learned the idiosyncratic artistic style on display in the early galleries of the MoMA retrospective, in which American subject matter was fitted to the nervous mannerism of an El Greco: overall-clad sharecroppers wobbling on elongated rubbery limbs that ripple as though afflicted with an excess of kinetic energy.

Much later, Pollock would turn Benton into a foil, portraying him as the oppressive realist against whom he had to rebel in order to go his own way (and whose wife he would brag of having seduced). But if Benton's legacy vanished from the canvas, it remained in Pollock's hand, which never lost its sense that a line might be an agitated, quivering thing.

After breaking from his mentor, Pollock lunged from influence to influence: from Mexican muralists like José Clemente Orozco, with his monumental pageants of proletarian martyrs, to Picasso, shards of whose *Guernica* flit through Pollock's sketchbooks, to Joan Miró and the Surrealists from whom he borrowed his biomorphic figures swimming in primordial seas. In performing all these modernist finger exercises, Pollock apparently suffered no "anxiety of influence"—except perhaps for the one primal influence he could not seem to shake, namely, that of Benton himself. In this respect he was much like the American Impressionists who studied in Paris in the 1880's and returned home to find they were still American painters after all.

After 1935, Pollock supported himself through the Federal Art Project of the WPA, receiving a monthly stipend of about $100 for submitting paintings to be hung in public buildings; nearly all the 50 or so canvases he produced are lost. In his essay on Pollock for the catalogue, Varnedoe does not make anything of this long grind, which lasted, with gaps, until 1943, but it is hard to think it was without meaning for Pollock's development. Did he use the opportunity to explore modernist devices in public art, or simply churn out conventional material in return for a paycheck? To judge from Pollock's own laconic remarks about this period—and his failure to preserve photographs or studies—one would guess the latter. Still, working for the government gave him the benefit of an inordinately long apprenticeship, and perhaps also helped inoculate him against preciousness.

AROUND 1940, Pollock began to put the pieces together. Coming out

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of a prolonged hospitalization for alcoholism, he fell under the care of psychiatrists, mostly Jungians, who encouraged him to make drawings as therapy: stream-of-consciousness images that unveiled themselves through a process of automatic writing. To an artist unsure of his own hand, this was a liberating device, and once he began to apply the lesson to his painting his progress was rapid. By 1943, the forms in his drawings were beginning to break up, the lines themselves to become sovereign. In *The Moon-Woman Cuts the Circle* of that year, the only object whose contours are still intact is the knife wielded by the central female figure, while she herself dissolves into a frenzied Medusa of tendrils and globules.

Whether or not Pollock was punning on his own willful obliteration of recognizable geometric shapes, the title of this painting was prophetic. From that moment on, line and color would no longer cooperate to define form but swirl independently as in a maelstrom. Pollock was now toying with drips and splatters, and although it would be several years before he made them the basis of a work, his distinctive manner of turbulent gestural drawing, not so much calligraphic as seismographic, was already becoming recognizable. By late 1943, Clement Greenberg made an urgent announcement in the *Nation*: Pollock's works were "the strongest abstract paintings I have yet seen by an American."

It is difficult to imagine Pollock becoming an influential artist at any other time in American history. For all his compulsive borrowing, his very openness made him peculiarly responsive to the situation of American art on the eve of World War II. In brief, that situation offered a modernist painter two possibilities (both imported from Europe), which in a certain sense were irreconcilable. On the one hand, there was the pictorial abstraction of Picasso: the rendering of form in a Cubist lattice that exalted the act of formal composition, adjusting proportions, masses, and color to create a unified artistic statement. On the other hand, there was Surrealism, whose unruly camp (including Miró, Matta, and Dali) cultivated a cryptic language of dream imagery, cherishing the absurd and the accidental. Surrealists inhabited an utterly separate mental world from Cubists, having nothing but contempt for the polite and fussy business of form, and promising, or seeming to promise, a direct connection with primitive sources of power.

It was Pollock's great achievement to wed these two European doctrines—Cubism's subjectless abstraction and Surrealism's spontaneity—into a modern American art. And central to this achievement was his abandonment of the brushstroke for the drip and the pour. Other artists, particularly the Surrealists, had poured fluid paint onto an unsized canvas, but Pollock was the first to exploit the technique as a way of composing an entire painting—even making it the subject and theme of the painting itself. Once introduced (in 1947), the technique swiftly ramified, as Pollock learned to fling his paint from brushes, dump it from cans, squeeze it from tubes, and dribble it from sticks. The result was a kind of hydraulic language for which our own verbal language does not offer enough distinctions. (Varnedoe jokes that to describe Pollock's technique properly, we would require as many different words for lines as Eskimos supposedly have for snow.)

With poured painting, a new kind of pictorial composition came into being. No longer was there a hierarchy of distinct objects or forms in space; rather, the entire field of the canvas quivered at a virtually uniform intensity. This was the "all-over" surface that became so central to modernist art in the 1950's, and that demanded a new way of looking, a confrontation with the entirety of a canvas in which there was no center and no up or down. In Pollock's case, contributing to the "all-over" sense was his habit of painting on the floor of his Long Island studio, working from all sides and from above so that he could enlist the force of gravity.

Pollock's discoveries ricocheted through the next decade, with consequences bigger than his own career. In its way his method was rather narrow, a mannerism as eccentric and limited as Benton's; but it opened up a whole spectrum of possibilities whose effects extended from the almost calligraphic art of Franz Kline to the lineless color of Mark Rothko. While Willem de Kooning is generally acknowledged today as the superior American talent of those years, Pollock was unquestionably the greater influence, the painter with lessons to offer to all.

THE RETROSPECTIVE at the Museum of Modern Art was its third Pollock exhibition, and in these three shows is embedded a larger story.

The museum bought its first Pollock painting in 1944. Its first retrospective was held in 1957, following the artist's death, and it was accompanied by a pamphlet with a slim essay by the art critic Sam Hunter. In 1949, when Pollock first emerged as a national figure, Hunter had worried in the *New York Times* that he represented "the disintegration of modern painting"; now he staked out what might be considered the existentialist claim for Pollock. His work, Hunter wrote, "belonged rather to the vast free spaces of modern science, and in pictorial metaphor showed the limits of the modern individual's rational powers by opening up glimpses of a nature essentially irrational and chaotic."

By the time of the second retrospective in 1967, the largest the museum had ever devoted to an American artist, there was no need for such sweeping statements: Pollock's significance was self-evident. The

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catalogue had now expanded to book length, but there was no interpretative essay at all, only a meticulous, year-by-year chronology with copious excerpts from reviews and letters. Although the compilation is still a useful reference, in the end this was a saint's life, not a reassessment.

But 1967 was also perhaps the last moment when Abstract Expressionism still seemed to have historical inevitability on its side. Since then, the high modernism of the 1950's, with its stress on the formal and aesthetic primacy of the object, has come into disrepute. And yet, if Pollock is no longer to be judged on formal and aesthetic grounds, how is he to be judged? This is the dilemma behind the latest Pollock retrospective.

BOTH EXHIBITION and catalogue devote a generous amount of space to the mechanical procedures and the physical properties of Pollock's paintings, but rather less to their ultimate significance. Kirk Varnedoe, a writer with an arresting voice if also with something of an "all-over" style of his own, is often convincing about the work at the level of the page, but when it comes to Pollock's place in history he resorts to bet-hedging. With ten times as many pages at his disposal as Hunter, he cannot bring himself to make positive statements, except about the virtue of not making positive statements: "Showing a way to keep either-or judgments at bay may be among Pollock's prime legacies." As legacies go, this is a far cry from an art that confronts "the vast free spaces of modern science."

One strand of recent revisionist criticism holds that the Abstract Expressionists were complicit with American cold-war politics of the 1950's. To his credit, Varnedoe, after inventorying the revisionist literature, rejects the accusation, arguing for the essentially apolitical nature of Pollock's art. At the same time, though, he seems unaware of the degree to which his own judgments reflect generally held prejudices in the art world. The most flagrant example of this is his treatment of Thomas Hart Benton.

In art circles, Benton has been despised as a right-wing figure since the 1930's. Each subsequent generation has found fresh reasons for condemning him, the most recent charge being "homophobia." The same bias is reflected in the tendency to downplay Benton's influence on Pollock, other than to note their shared interest in a turbulent line. In fact, however, one of the most exciting things about this exhibition is to see just how lasting was Benton's influence on his student, even in the heroic canvases of 1950.

These are the subject of an essay in the catalogue by Pepe Karmel. Using computer-assisted analysis of the films and photographs of the artist at work, Karmel has reconstructed the development of several of Pollock's most important paintings from the summer of 1950, including the seventeen-foot-long *Autumn Rhythm*. Although these works are generally regarded as his freest and most successful exercises in drip painting, Karmel shows that they invariably began not in a frenzy of splattering and spilling but in a deliberate process of *drawing*, in which abstracted human figures were spaced in discrete zones. This, as it happens, was precisely the system that Benton taught, and was the formal basis of the jingoistic murals on which his reputation rose and fell.

His latter-day detractors notwithstanding, Benton was no provincial ignoramus. In fact, in the 1910's he was among the first generation of American abstract artists, and even after he became an apostate from modernism his work continued to manifest the lessons he had learned from it. While his finished figures themselves were realist, in his studies Benton diagrammed their undulating limbs and elongated heads as abstract patterns of force. This was always known; but it was not clear until now how deeply Pollock clung to the method—or how tenaciously he hid it from view.

To grasp the full significance of this point, one needs to know that, in the usual interpretation, Pollock's figural drawings are said to represent conscious control, while his turn to abstraction is held to have unleashed "unconscious motor impulses." The truth, as Karmel suggests, may be the reverse: when beginning a composition, he would regress to his unconscious storehouse of figural forms, and then deliberately seek to veil them in a web of overpainting. As for the relationship between Benton and Pollock, it emerges as far more complex and intimate than has yet been acknowledged. And yet Varnedoe, in the very same catalogue where Karmel's revealing essay appears, simply mouths the conventional wisdom, calling Benton a "swaggering blowhard" who represented a "reactionary chauvinism" and whose influence on Pollock was "toxic." Such, one supposes, are the politics of the self-consciously apolitical.

WITH VERY few exceptions, the critics have lauded the MoMA exhibition, with most reviewers taking the occasion to muse about Pollock's meaning today. From these musings it is certainly clear that he no longer enjoys the unquestioned iconic status he once did. In a generally admiring review in the *New Republic*, for example, Jed Perl noted that Pollock's work is "fundamentally static," and that nothing in the show was indisputably a masterpiece. Hilton Kramer wrote to similar effect in the *New York Observer*.

But others went much farther, seemingly out of a determination to dislodge Pollock altogether from the pantheon of formal modernists. Most egregious in this respect was Adam Gopnik, who in an essay in the *New Yorker* began by loftily comparing Pollock with Watteau and Tiepolo but then rapidly descended into platitudes—"a pop story, with

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pop shapes and pop triumphs"—and speculation about which star might play him in a movie (Ed Harris). Unfortunately, once Pollock is removed from the framework of formalist criteria, one is left only with the celebrity artist of *Time* and *Life*—which is more or less where Gopnik places him.

It is instructive to compare Gopnik's belittling scorn with a terse notice from 1955 in which the art historian Leo Steinberg argued that, questions of quality aside, Pollock's work had the "barbarism of an ancient epic. Does anybody ask whether the Song of Gilgamesh is any good?" In a poignant afterthought, Steinberg went on to suggest that if Pollock's work was indeed epic, it required a more sober response than the cheerful Rotarian optimism then on offer from *Life*. To judge from Gopnik's *New Yorker* article, as well as from Varnedoe's essay in the catalogue, this sober response seems no longer to be forthcoming. And that is a real loss, for without it we cannot see the extent to which Pollock was unusual in the long perspective of American art.

Americans, including the artists among them, have a rich tradition of indifference to or suspicion of high art, and tend to justify its existence, when called upon to do so, by ascribing useful functions to it. In this sense, the moral didacticism of a Hudson River School painting and the "consciousness-raising" effect of a Karen Finley performance work are kindred, and quintessentially American, creations.

There are two major historical exceptions to this broad pattern of indifference to art-for-art's-sake: the Aesthetic movement of the 1880's, and the Abstract Expressionist movement of the 1940's and 1950's. Each was fundamentally sensual in its orientation, rather than didactic or utilitarian; in each case the crystallizing factor was a sudden and concentrated influx of European ideas; and in the aftermath of each, painting again reverted to blunt lucidity of expression, strong narrative content, and schematic flatness. It may be true, as Gopnik intimates, that Pop artists envied Pollock's cocky, cheeky persona, but the airbrushed plastic surfaces of their work could not be further from the tactile sensuousness of his.

Pollock's position in American art is much like that of James Whistler, another champion of radical sensualism whose work cannot be properly evaluated in terms of subject matter and content but only in optical terms. The careers of both artists suggest that, from time to time, and under certain circumstances, an abundance of inexpressible feeling may overflow the relatively narrow channels through which American art typically flows. That one would look in vain for any understanding of this in the present disinclination to enter any large claims for Jackson Pollock is very much to be regretted, even as one has reason to be grateful to an exhibition that documents his achievement more thoroughly than has ever been done before.

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Books in Review

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Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 742 pp. $28.95

Reviewed by
Christopher Caldwell

In a manifesto published in *Harper's* in 1989, Tom Wolfe rued the tendency of modern novelists to take shelter in "minimalist" tales about their own personal experience. In their place, Wolfe called for a "new social novel," along the lines of the sweeping narratives of the 19th century. What American literature needed, he wrote, was an infusion of "Dickens, Dostoevsky, Balzac, Zola, and Sinclair Lewis."

Much of what we treasure in these older writers, Wolfe opined, was their *reporting* on life as they found it. If this sounded self-serving—reporting, after all, was Wolfe's métier, the beat on which he had made his name with such now-canonical works as *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby* (1965) and *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (1968)—he could by now flourish a novelist's proven credentials. His own big, brawny, well-researched first novel, *Bonfire of the Vanities* (1988), had spent the good part of a year on the best-seller lists. "At this weak, pale, tabescent moment in the history of American literature," he concluded, "we need a battalion, a brigade, of Zolas to head out into this wild, bizarre, unpredictable, hog-stomping baroque country of ours and reclaim its literary property."

Wolfe's second best-selling novel, *A Man in Full*, is intended to serve as another such work of reclamation. It is the story of sixty-year-old Charlie Croker, an undereducated ex-college-football star who has developed much of the skyline of Atlanta, Georgia, out of sheer élan vital. Along the way, he has picked up several businesses, a Gulfstream-5 jet, a ludicrous 29,000-acre antebellum plantation (called "Turpmtine") that he uses for quail hunting and writes off as an "experimental farm," and a wife who is less than half his age. Now he has plowed hundreds of millions of his own and other people's money into a 40-story office building for which he cannot find tenants. When we meet him, the creditors are closing in.

As in *Bonfire*, Wolfe garlands his story with sharply observed vignettes. No scene in *A Man in Full* has been more widely or justly praised than the "workout session" in which loan officers make it their project to humiliate Charlie and get him to feel like the delinquent debtor ("shithead," in their parlance) that he is. Placing him in a seat guaranteed to catch glare from the window, they prepare him a cup of rancid coffee and send in a pudgy little "workout artiste" who wears suspenders with a skull-and-crossbones motif and assaults Charlie until "the saddlebags"—patches of panic-induced sweat—spread from under his arms to meet at his sternum.

A Man in Full is replete with such observed minutiae—examples of Wolfe's vaunted "reporting." What they are in the service of, however, is a matter of some contention. In his review of the novel in the *New*

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Yorker, John Updike wrote that "In a strange but honorable way, Wolfe has attempted a Great Black Novel." And there is, indeed, a strong racial plot line that arises out of Charlie's financial misery.

Georgia Tech's star running back, a ghetto hoodlum named Fareek Fanon, has been accused of raping the daughter of one of Charlie's friends, a pillar of the good-'ol-boy establishment. But Atlanta's black mayor, facing reelection, needs to prevent racial unrest, and Georgia Tech's football coach must have Fareek in the backfield. The two enlist an old friend of the mayor, the cultivated lawyer Roger White II ("Roger Too White" to his fellow black Atlantans), to approach Croker with a quid pro quo: appeal for calm in the name of Atlanta's white elite, and we will call off the bank's dogs.

BUT IN the end Updike is mistaken. Although a wide variety of black characters does populate these pages, ranging from Fareek Fanon to an ex-basketball-playing political firebrand to a corrupt mayor to a radical newspaper editor, most of them are dealt with rather superficially, and their variety stems largely from Wolfe's acute ability to transcribe idiosyncratic physical details like their clothes and their speech patterns. In other respects, *A Man in Full* does not take race seriously enough to be about race.

What it does take seriously is sex, and in particular masculinity. Wolfe's prose is itself sexual, metaphorically lush with the "loamy loins" of women and the "green breasts" of lawns and bank executives "bulging with testosterone" and the "testicular squall" of shouting prison inmates. Moreover, the passages rendered with the most genuine pathos are those in which it dawns on Charlie that he has made a colossal mistake in leaving his first wife for his second, a "boy with breasts" who can offer him only sex. "Your first wife," he thinks, "married you for better or for worse. Your second wife, particularly if you were sixty and she was a twenty-eight-year-old number like Serena—why kid yourself?—she married you for better."

Indeed, if *A Man in Full* has a theme, it is—as John Podhoretz, writing in the *Weekly Standard*, was alone among critics in stressing—manhood. "He has this . . . *thing* about Southern manhood," says one of Charlie's business associates; so does Wolfe. In the novel, other men, like Charlie's accountant, "the Wiz," are constantly being measured against Croker and found wanting:

> The Wiz looked upon him as an aging, uneducated, and out-of-date country boy who had somehow, nonetheless, managed to create a large, and, until recently, wildly successful corporation. That the country boy, with half his brainpower, should be the lord of the corporation and that [the Wiz] should be his vassal was an anomaly, a perversity of fate. . . . Or part of him felt that way. The other part of him was in awe, in unconscious awe, of something the old boy had and he didn't: namely, the power to charm men and the manic drive to bend their wills into saying yes to projects they didn't want, didn't need, and never thought about before. . . . And that thing was manhood. It was as simple as that.

Of course, Charlie's virility is worth little once the accountants and naysayers—the weaklings, the milquetoasts—take over. Much of the book is about his attempts to find a manly way out of this crisis, or, even, a place where it is possible to *be* manly. When Charlie and his friend Billy Bass—an archetypal redneck lout who, unsurprisingly, turns out to be a gentleman in private—start joking about AIDS over dinner, to the horror of Charlie's guests, Charlie asks: "If a man couldn't speak his mind and be a man here, where the hell could he?" A profoundly bleak view of American society emerges from such scenes. Rather than the "baroque," "hog-stomping" country Wolfe pictured in 1989, the America of *A Man in Full* is squeamish, conformist, politically correct, and intolerant of "big" characters like Charlie Croker.

For Charlie, at any rate, the way out of the man-swallowing morass requires a major secondary plot line that will not intersect with his until the last hundred pages of the novel. Since liquidating his luxuries is out of the question, Croker instead lays off thousands of employees in his various enterprises. One of these is Conrad Hensley, a deeply intelligent twenty-four-year-old freezer-packer. A family man and self-identified "bourgeois," in rebellion against his hippie parents' ethic of "Go with the flow," Conrad dreams of buying a condo on his $14-an-hour wage. Through a series of mishaps he winds up convicted of manslaughter, and while in prison accidentally comes into possession of an anthology of ancient Stoic philosophy. This becomes the agent of his liberation and—when the two characters inevitably meet—of Charlie's redemption as a man.

GIVEN THE power and resonance of Wolfe's materials, and the suggestive rightness of his theme at this particular moment in our sexual history, it would be wonderful to report that *A Man in Full* delivers completely on its rich promise. Alas, that is not the case. Although, for instance, the freezer plant where Conrad works is capably evoked in all its particulars, such evocations outrun Wolfe's ability to make novelistic sense of them. Similarly with his efforts to use Conrad as an exemplar. So two-dimensionally heroic are the passages in which this figure appears that one critic (Martin Amis) has properly characterized them as "for-younger-readers" writing. Take, for example, the fight

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scene where Conrad breaks the hands of a prison bully:

> "Awwwwwwwhhhhhhhhhh!" A groan, very nearly a howl, rose from deep inside the brute. His eyes closed, and his face became terribly contorted. He kept clawing at Conrad's hand, but now Conrad forced his wrist over backward. The brute had no choice but to try to shift his weight to get out from under the fierce torque.

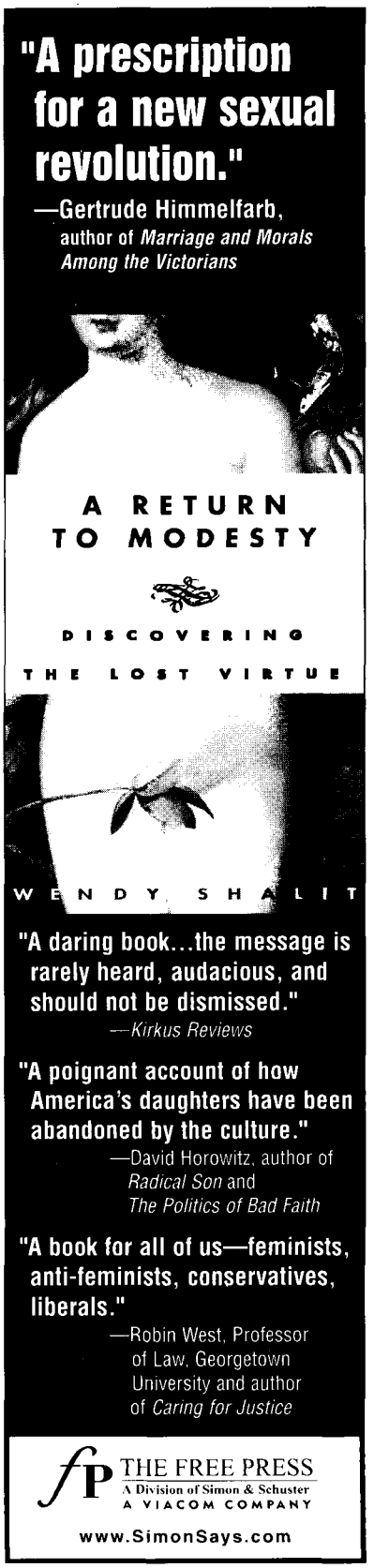
That the proletarian hero of *A Man in Full* should be so much less convincing than the plutocratic one may be evidence that Wolfe is better at writing about the upper echelons of society than about the lower. But whatever the source of the difficulty, his failure to realize Conrad creates a serious imbalance. In a novel devoted to manliness, we get a realistic depiction of only one kind—and it is a particularly narrow kind.

Manhood in these pages is something almost purely biological, or anatomical, with "man" being a virtual synonym for "beast." Charlie's firmly held theory is that "if you lost your sexual drive, you lost everything, your energy, your daring, your imagination." Later: "He knew the truth in his loins." In this sense, if there is anything 19th-century about *A Man in Full*, it comes not from the many-splendored social realism of a Balzac or a Dickens but from Zola's biological naturalism, in which characters act as ciphers for some larger "life-force." And just as Zola's fiction rests, to a degree that embarrasses his champions, on a crude popular Darwinism, Wolfe's world view could almost be lifted from a text by Konrad Lorenz.

This is hardly to say that *A Man in Full* is without its delights, many of them already alluded to—though here, too, a qualification is needed. Wolfe's greatest strength lies, in fact, less in his reporting than in the talents, largely satirical, he has always *brought* to his reporting.

First among these is a gleeful sense of humor, most obviously on display in a punsmanship that lights up Wolfe's work in an almost Joycean fashion. In *A Man in Full*, one pro-basketball player is named You Gene Jones, and the half-dozen law firms have names like Clockett, Paddet, Skynnham & Glote. Then there is Wolfe's formidable gift for parody: unable to fall asleep, Charlie sits in his dressing room with a copy of a "business book" titled *The Paper Millionaire*, struggling to get past the flap copy: "In the course of his astonishing career, Roger Shashoua made it, lost it, made it, lost it, made it yet again and then, with impeccable timing, walked away from it all." The effects Wolfe achieves by these means, and by means of the dozens of literary practical jokes buried with exquisite artfulness in his pages, are dazzling.

To his great credit, Tom Wolfe has identified some of the real difficulties that beset the modern novelist, and over the course of two big books has made a strenuous effort—a manly effort—to show us what a remedy would look like. In so doing, he has fashioned vividly fresh scenes, first out of mid-1980's New York and then out of mid-1990's Atlanta, and he has brought to bear spectacular satiric gifts. No more in his case than in the case of other recent "big" writers, however, is there any shortcut around the novelist's test of all tests, which is to create plausible characters acting in ways that convey human truths of lasting significance. That "battalion of Zolas" he called for brings much to the novel-writing table, and for this we have reason to be very grateful; the pity is that it does not bring everything.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Vox Pop?

Who Speaks for America? Why Democracy Matters in Foreign Policy

by Eric Alterman

Cornell. 224 pp. $25.00

Reviewed by
Aaron L. Friedberg

IN 1992, Eric Alterman, then a left-wing scourge of right-wing pundits, published *Sound and Fury*, a vitriolic if often funny assault on such conservative luminaries as George F. Will, William Safire, and Charles Krauthammer. Today, as a columnist for the *Nation*, an occasional contributor to *Slate* and the *New York Times*, and a commentator on MSNBC, Alterman has himself become a member in good standing of the "punditocracy" he once blamed for "the collapse of American politics."

Despite his recent success in the sound-bite business, however, Alterman clearly still craves intellectual respectability. His new book, *Who Speaks for America? Why Democracy Matters in Foreign Policy*, is crammed with footnotes, freighted with citations from the works of heavyweights like John Dewey, John Stuart Mill, and the German political philosopher Jürgen Habermas, and anchored by dust-jacket endorsements from sympathetic scholars. The result is a book that, lacking the gossipy verve of Alterman's earlier work, manages to be both leaden and superficial at once.

ALTERMAN'S THESIS in *Who Speaks for America?* is that our diplomacy has become the exclusive preserve of a "foreign-policy establishment" made up of an arrogant, internationalist elite that is shielded from scrutiny by a collusive media. The members of this establishment regard ordinary Americans as ignorant, irrational, and irresponsible. At its direction, the United States has been following a course that reflects neither the public's true wishes nor its underlying values.

A truly popular foreign policy, Alterman claims, would minimize overseas involvement while vigilantly defending the jobs of American workers. But the problem is that while the American people "do not accept the foreign-policy establishment's definition of the nation's priorities," they "do not know how to force a reassessment." And no wonder. Major media outlets are increasingly controlled by a handful of like-minded corporate giants, and both the media and the electoral system have become hopelessly subject to special interests. Of these, among the most effective manipulators and special pleaders are "pro-Israel American Jews."

HOW DID this happen? In Alterman's retelling of our diplomatic history, expansionism and the progressive destruction of American democracy have long gone hand in hand. When Thomas Jefferson engineered the Louisiana purchase without consulting Congress, he fatally cast aside the principle of limited government he himself had done so much to articulate. And if Jefferson could at least be said to have acted in a noble purpose—he believed more territory was necessary to the preservation of a virtuous republic of yeoman farmers—his successors were driven by simple greed for land and power. By the end of the 19th century, long after the North American continent had been subdued,

> expansion and abuses of presidential power continued to escalate, leading to foreign wars of conquest, entangling alliances, the creation of a large standing army, and the trampling of the very republican values . . . expansion had been intended to protect.

This process reached its tragic culmination in the 20th century. After using force repeatedly in Central America without congressional authorization, Woodrow Wilson led the nation into war in Europe, brushing aside demands for a referendum and jailing those who opposed his wishes. Franklin D. Roosevelt, though he acted in a good cause, was no bargain, either. Steering the United States onto a collision course with fascism, he "compromised Americans' constitutional freedoms," attempted to control information, and even went so far as "deliberately [to] mislead his citizens."

The cold war put the final nail in the coffin of democracy. As the "secrecy virus" multiplied, "paranoia prospered and debate fizzled." Americans were marched off in lockstep to war in Korea and Vietnam. Bad as was the damage wreaked abroad, moreover, it had "incalculable" consequences at home, in the form of a mindless anti-Communism that quashed all debate and rendered all opposition illegitimate. As things stand today, the vast majority of Americans have been left "with no voice whatsoever in foreign policymaking."

In Alterman's opinion, restoring that voice will require radical, even revolutionary, measures. His own favored solution is to place control over foreign policy in the hands of a "citizens' jury": an elected body of 500 or 600 "ordinary people" serving one-time, six-year terms. Only thus can the stranglehold of the special interests be broken, and the executive be forced to respond to "legitimate democratic currents."

WHAT CAN be said about all this? The idea that our foreign-policy system is somehow insulated from the give and take of democratic politics can be sustained only at the cost of ignoring more than two centuries of fierce controversies over every aspect of American engagement abroad. Especially odd is the

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notion of a dearth of serious debate during the cold war—either in the Korean conflict, when fierce attacks on U.S. policy came from the Right, or during the Vietnam era, when fiercer and ultimately more influential attacks came from the Left.

Whatever one's judgment of this ongoing ferment, it is symptomatic of Alterman's own shallow analysis that he brushes past the question of whether good foreign policies are necessarily popular, or popular policies necessarily good. He seems completely unaware, for example, that the 19th-century expansionism he deplores enjoyed widespread public support. Nor, on the other hand, does he inquire whether the cause of democracy would have been better served if Franklin Roosevelt had narrowly adhered to the isolationist impulses of a majority of his constituents and bent every effort to keep the U.S. out of World War II.

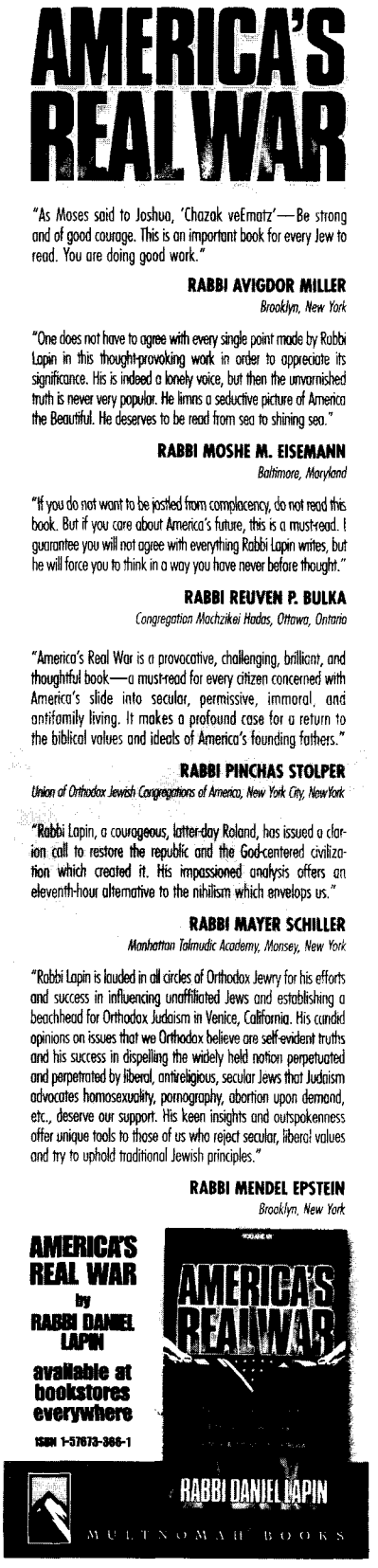
Since then, to judge from their electoral choices and their repeated responses to public-opinion pollsters, the American people have been broadly supportive of an activist foreign policy. The current period is no exception. If anything, it is Alterman's isolationist and protectionist predilections that are today distinctly a minority view. In excoriating the American impulses toward economic openness and vigorous diplomatic and military engagement, he, and not the foreign-policy elite, is the one who is at odds with the American people.

As for what Alterman jauntily refers to as his "immodest proposal" for reform, one is minimally curious to know more. How, exactly, would his people's committee do its work, and what would be the scope and limits of its authority? Would the citizens' jury rule on every jot and tittle of diplomatic detail, or merely set the broad outlines? Would it make its decisions by a simple majority vote? By unanimous consent? In the event of a "hung jury," would the United States simply not *have* a policy? But to raise such questions is already to treat with too much seriousness an essentially frivolous proposal for scrapping the constitutionally ordained procedures that have governed American statecraft for two centuries.

Which brings us at last to Alterman's accusations against the malign power of ethnic groups, and especially of American Jews. Not only, he writes in *Who Speaks for America?*, do Jews "contribute enormous sums to political candidates," but they enjoy "tremendous access to the highest reaches of the punditocracy." Jews, and Jewish influence, are everywhere. According to surveys, "26 percent of reporters, editors, and executives at major print and broadcast media are Jewish *and therefore*, one may fairly speculate, likely to be sympathetic to Israel" (emphasis added). In addition, "Martin Peretz owns the *New Republic*. Mortimer Zuckerman owns *U.S. News & World Report*. . . . The American Jewish Committee publishes Commentary"—three influential publications among many that, as Alterman sees it, are convinced that Israel can do no wrong.

This is hardly the only passage in *Who Speaks for America?* that bids fair to qualify Eric Alterman as the Patrick J. Buchanan of the Left; both fear free trade, foreign entanglements, and elite conspiracies. And it was Buchanan, the right-wing columnist and quondam presidential candidate, who, in the debate before the Gulf war, loudly referred to American Jews in Congress and the media as an "amen corner" for Israel's interests; Alterman is here merely echoing that scurrilous charge.

The idea that it is somehow illegitimate for American citizens to express their views on foreign policy would seem rather to undercut the main thesis of this book concerning the lamentable voicelessness of "the people"—unless, that is, Alterman means to imply that American citizens and American Jews are to be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understood as two distinct categories. Be that as it may, it is ludicrous to conclude that the Jewishness of many journalists predisposes them in Israel's favor; the evidence on this point is at best mixed, else one would have a hard time explaining the fact that the attitude toward Israel in the elite media these days is better characterized as skeptical or even hostile than supportive. On this point, Alterman's real quarrel is, again, not with the elites or the "special interests," Jewish or otherwise, but with the American people, who continue stubbornly to register high levels of sympathy for Israel, and to regard our support for it as a national priority.

In the end, Alterman's self-proclaimed eagerness to reinvigorate our democracy, and his willingness to jettison our fundamental institutions in the service of that goal, may reflect nothing more than a frustrated recognition that the country has not been going in directions he favors. Like many radical reformers, he claims to speak for "the people"; but the people, thankfully, have ideas of their own.

Beyond Victimhood

A Dream Deferred:
The Second Betrayal of Black Freedom in America
by Shelby Steele
HarperCollins. 185 pp. $24.00

Reviewed by
Peter Berkowitz

IN *The Content of Our Character*, the 1990 book that first brought him to national attention, Shelby Steele described himself as a "forty-ish, middle-class, black American male" who had concluded, on the basis of his own experience and that of others like him, that there is now "an enormous range of opportunity open to blacks in this society." As dramatic a departure as this was from the conventional wisdom of the civil-rights establishment, Steele went still farther, arguing that to take advantage of these opportunities, blacks needed to embrace more fully certain basic American ideals:

> There will be no end to despair and no lasting solution to any of our problems until we rely on individual effort within the American mainstream—rather than collective action against the mainstream—as our means of advancement. We need a collective identity that encourages diversity within the race, that does not make black unity a form of repression, that does not imply that the least among us are the most black, and that makes the highest challenge of "blackness" personal development.

For giving powerful contemporary voice to Martin Luther King, Jr.'s dream that one day individual blacks would be judged not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character, Steele was rewarded with a certain amount of fame but an even greater amount of notoriety. In particular, black and white intellectuals of the Left greeted his defection from orthodoxy with loud and often personal vituperation.

IN HIS new book, Steele shows the scars of this unpleasantness. He is older, angrier, and understandably less patient with those who refuse to weigh his case on its merits. In "The Loneliness of the 'Black Conservative,'" an essay that comprises nearly half the book, he complains with justice that he has been defined, and vilified, not in terms of the views usually associated with conservatives—loyalty to tradition or embrace of the free market—but for the simple fact that he refuses to treat the oppression of American blacks as the sole explanation for their fate. When a black female journalist declares to Steele, "I don't think we can tell the story of our victimization enough," he replies with palpable ire. People can also suffer, he quotes himself responding, from "ignorance, fear, a poor assessment of reality, and from a politics that commits them to the idea of themselves as victims."

Such indignation courses through *A Dream Deferred*, but it hardly makes Steele's thought "entirely reactive," as the sociologist Alan Wolfe charged in his review of the book in the *New Republic*. Indeed, Steele's new essays make clear that, in common with many other so-called conservatives, he remains very much a liberal, albeit one in the old-fashioned or classical sense. For him, individual freedom and personal responsibility are non-negotiable, and represent two sides of the same coin. These principles, he maintains, are the necessary foundation not only for American self-government but also for the dream of racial integration, to which he remains rock-solid in his devotion.

STEELE'S POSITION is informed by a complex appreciation of America's tragic racial history. After 300 years of slavery and segregation, he believes American society "must bear an undeniable shame." And he is convinced that despite great strides in this country over the last 40 years, racism remains a problem. Still, after marching alongside his father in the 1950's to win the right to eat at the lunch counter of Woolworth's, after working in four different Great Society programs during the 60's and 70's, and after observing the interventions by government, universities, and businesses in behalf of blacks over the last 30 years, Steele has concluded that the reform efforts conducted under liberalism's banner have betrayed liberalism's highest principles, and

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harmed the very group they were meant to uplift.

Steele's main target is the sensibility according to which racial preferences are the indispensable means to achieving equality for blacks. Calling this attitude "redemptive" liberalism, he contrasts it to the classical-liberal spirit of the early civil-rights movement. Whereas the latter sought to secure freedom for the individual by guaranteeing fair process, the former strives for the far more ambitious goal of an ideal society, concerning itself above all with the wounded souls of the victims and the inner moral intentions of their champions. If classical liberalism is defined by the universal principles of opportunity, responsibility, and merit, redemptive liberalism measures itself in terms of equality of result, ideological conformity, and deference to those who suffer.

Steele is at his best in laying bare the psychology and governing impulses of this new brand of liberalism. He offers a sharp critique of what he calls the black "grievance elite," a coterie of scholars, activists, and politicians who provide soothing rationalizations of black helplessness, thus strengthening their own grip on power, but who utterly fail to deliver what their communities most desperately need to hear from them: internal criticism and a summons to responsibility.

He is also unsparing in his analysis of white liberals. Burdened by shame over America's legacy of racial injustice, they care more about expiating that sense of shame than about dealing with the actual needs of their would-be wards. In pursuit of their own redemption, they have promoted quick fixes and symbolic gestures that have actually debilitated those whom they pride themselves on benefiting:

> Welfare without a time limit or an expectation of work may have shown white America as compassionate, but it also took the problem of poverty away from those who suffer it. When universities took responsibility for the problem of black underrepresentation on campus, and lowered standards to raise the numbers, then blacks became invested in the academic weakness that won the specialness of a double standard. . . . The black reward follows the display of difficulty, not the display of success.

What social and political reforms would be consistent with putting the human needs of blacks first? Respecting the limits of his own expertise, Steele does not engage the fine points of policy-making. The initiatives that he does endorse—outreach, remedial education, faith-based community groups—do, however, share certain characteristics. They assume that those who suffer can nevertheless exercise control over their own lives; they treat opportunity as a responsibility and not as a guaranteed outcome; they strictly avoid categorizing individuals by race; and they insist on high standards for everyone. Only when reforms meet these conditions, Steele argues, can the disadvantaged begin to develop the qualities of mind and character that will enable them to care for themselves, their families, and their communities.

At the core of Steele's critique of racial politics in the United States is a simple thought: race is an inescapable fact, but the demands of human dignity are more urgent. Of this position he writes, "Call it conservatism, classic liberalism, or simply a hard-earned wisdom"; what matters is not what it is called but that it is heard. With searing eloquence and an inspiring display of the freedom of mind that he wishes to encourage in others, Shelby Steele reminds us of the demanding principles by which Americans of every race can yet live together with pride and mutual respect.

When Solidarity Fails

Brother Against Brother: Violence and Extremism in Israeli Politics from Altalena to the Rabin Assassination
by Ehud Sprinzak
Free Press. 384 pp. $27.50

Reviewed by
Rael Jean Isaac

PERHAPS NO preconception about the Jews is so widely held as that they exhibit intense communal solidarity. The network of Jewish philanthropic institutions has long been the envy of other ethnic communities around the world, and threats to Jews anywhere have traditionally evoked a strong response from Jews everywhere: the international campaign on behalf of Soviet Jewry in the 1970's and 1980's is

RAEL JEAN ISAAC *is the author of two books on Israeli politics and co-author of* Madness in the Streets.

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merely the most recent case in point.

But there is another side to the coin. Intra-Jewish relations have themselves been punctuated by bitter hostilities, sometimes so rancorous as to erupt into violence. In the 1st and 2nd centuries B.C.E., Maccabees fought Hellenists; as the Second Temple fell to the Romans, Zealots battled other Jews; and in 18th-century Poland and Russia, Mitnagdim and Hasidim engaged in angry altercations.

Since its founding in 1948, the state of Israel has likewise had its share of bloody internal strife. In *Brother Against Brother*, Ehud Sprinzak, a professor of political science at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, offers a history of violence and extremism in the Jewish state, and an assessment of what the periodic flare-ups portend for his country's future. Unfortunately, this book is far from the dispassionate analysis the subject cries out for.

SPRINZAK OPENS his narrative with one of the most controversial confrontations in Israel's history, the *Altalena* affair. In the midst of Israel's War of Independence, Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, even as he was attempting to fend off five invading Arab states, engaged in a struggle with the Irgun, the militantly anti-British Jewish underground led by Menachem Begin. In mid-June 1948, the *Altalena*, a ship bound from France, appeared off the coast of Tel Aviv bearing $5-million worth of arms, a portion of them earmarked for Begin's forces. Ben-Gurion ordered the vessel shelled, and nineteen Jewish lives were lost.

Compared with that dramatic episode, what followed in the next two decades was relatively small beer. Sprinzak conducts us through an array of conflicts in Israel's early years: the impassioned struggle waged by Begin against acceptance of German reparations for the Holocaust; the efforts of a minuscule ultra-Orthodox "underground" to burn non-kosher butcher shops; the battle between the Histadrut, Israel's labor federation, and a would-be independent seaman's union; the assassination of Rudolf Kasztner, an official of the ruling Mapai (Labor) party accused of having collaborated with the Nazis; and sporadic violence by that segment of ultra-Orthodox Jewry which refused to accept the legitimacy of Israel's secular government.

Significant tension appeared again only after the 1967 Six-Day war, when Israel came into possession of the historical territories of Judea and Samaria on the west bank of the Jordan. In fact, as Sprinzak sees it, the internal divisions caused by the occupation of these territories, together with the rise of "Jewish religious fundamentalism," have elevated "Israeli political violence to unprecedented levels." As evidence, he cites the rise of a small Jewish underground from within the religious settler movement, Gush Emunim; the violent incitements of the late Rabbi Meier Kahane, founder of the Jewish Defense League in the United States and subsequently of the Kach movement in Israel; and the way in which the 1993 Oslo peace accords drove Israel's radical Right—the subject of a previous book by Sprinzak—to extremes that culminated in the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin in 1995.

THERE CAN be no doubt that in taking up the subject of Jewish-on-Jewish violence, Sprinzak is plowing ground of genuine importance. It is evident that whatever measure of national consensus had emerged in Israel by the time of the Six-Day war has been shattered in the ensuing decades, and dangerously so. Not only is Sprinzak's book helpful as a compendium of the various conflicts; on at least some of them he strikes a balanced note.

In his treatment of the *Altalena* affair, for example, Sprinzak usefully points out that a bloody denouement could have been avoided if Ben-Gurion had exercised more forbearance. The Irgun, he writes, had no plans to launch a putsch against the government; "its commander wished to use the weapons only to fight the Arabs." But Ben-Gurion never expressed the slightest remorse for his decision, and even years later would speak about the gun employed to fire on the *Altalena* as a "holy cannon."

Even as he judges Ben-Gurion's role in the bloodshed harshly, Sprinzak pays tribute to Menachem Begin for his extraordinary restraint both in this episode and in earlier crackdowns on the Irgun during which its members were imprisoned, tortured, and turned over to the British by fellow Jews. "There are few examples in modern history," Sprinzak observes, "of reputable fighting organizations coming under their competitor's attack and not fighting back."

When he turns to the contemporary scene, however, Sprinzak's own biases impede a similar clarity of vision. He is certainly correct that Israeli society is highly polarized today, but it is simply untrue that in the post-1967 period intra-Jewish strife has reached "unprecedented levels." As the evidence in his own book unequivocally shows, actual violence was vastly more prevalent in the early years of the Jewish state when the nation, in Sprinzak's own words, was on "the brink of civil war."

There has, of course, been an upsurge in violence in the most recent period, but overwhelmingly as the result of conflict between Arabs and Jews. For decades, Palestinians have engaged in actions ranging from stone-throwing to horrific acts of terrorism against Israeli civilians. A handful of Jewish extremists has answered in kind, the most notorious case being the killing of 29 Arab worshippers in Hebron by Baruch Goldstein.

While Sprinzak traces the growth of the Jewish side of this equation, he offers no real insight into the

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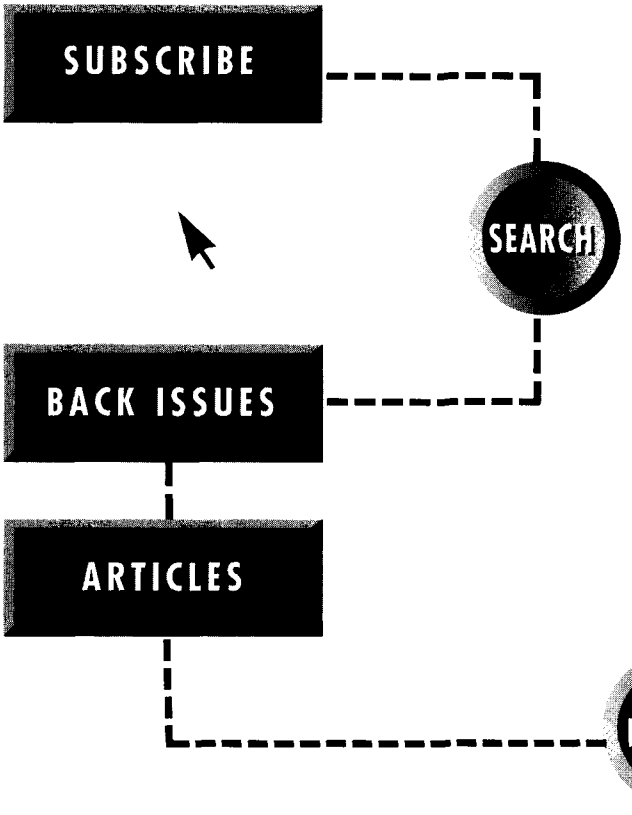

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motivations of the perpetrators, simply presenting them as "fanatics" in the grip of a "behavioral messianic craze." At the same time, the entire subject of Arab violence against Jews is either downplayed or ignored. Sprinzak repeatedly uses quotation marks around the phrase "'terror organization'" when referring to the PLO and at one point calls it the "peaceful PLO." The bloody bus bombings carried out by the Islamic fundamentalist group Hamas in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem he characterizes as "largely a response" to Baruch Goldstein.

Sprinzak's account of the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin is similarly one-sided. He sees the assassination as the logical fruit of a right-wing campaign of incitement and "character assassination" aimed at "delegitimizing" the architects of the Oslo accords. But he says not a word about the stream of invective demonizing the Right that emanated from Israel's intellectual elite long before Rabin's assassination and with special ferocity in its aftermath.

Examples are not hard to find. To Moshe Zimmerman, a professor of German studies at Hebrew University, the Jewish settlers of Hebron "are exactly like the 'Hitler youth.'" The artist Yigal Tumarkin has remarked that his "true contribution will be the taking of a submachine gun instead of pen and pencil, and killing" the religious settlers on the West Bank. In the eyes of the writer Amos Oz, the settler movement is a "messianic sect, closed and brutal, gangsters, criminals against humanity, sadists, pogromists and murderers, that has risen from a dark corner of Jewry." According to the novelist A.B. Yehoshua, "there's nothing wrong with a little civil war" that would dispose of the settlers.

Seeing only the religious messianism of the Right, Sprinzak misses the real story, which is the clash of messianisms under way in Israel today. As even some Left-of-Center commentators have been moved to observe, many members of the country's secular elites have become caught in the grip of their own, veritably messianic passion for "peace"; the more this passion is undercut by the implacable realities of the Middle East, the more fanatically they cling to it, and the more fervently they anathematize those among their fellow Israelis, especially the religious, whom they hold to blame for their frustrations.

Ehud Sprinzak says his book derives its significance from "the vast importance Jewish extremism and violence will have in shaping the future of the Middle East." In fact it is Arab extremism and violence, relegated to the distant background of his account, that will mainly determine the future of the Middle East, although it is certainly true that Israel's ability to withstand the challenges before it has been seriously weakened by the clash between the utopian Left and the religious-nationalist Right. Ignoring the dangerous reality without, and advancing a distorted account of what is indeed a crucial problem in Israel's domestic polity, Sprinzak contributes his share to exacerbating the very phenomenon he deplores.

Two Cheers

The American Century
by Harold Evans
Knopf. 710 pp. $50.00

Reviewed by
Walter A. McDougall

TOM WOLFE had their number back in the 60's, those mid-Atlantic men. Whereas Americans in pursuit of the mystique of aristocracy had always gone English, "the Englishman today," wrote Wolfe, "goes American, becomes a mid-Atlantic Man, to achieve the opposite. He wants to get out from under the domination of the English upper classes by going classless." In fact, according to Wolfe, the Englishmen in question tended to be middle-class, striving careerists in the arts of "brokerage, persuasion, savantry." Their metamorphosis into mid-Atlantic men would occur "one day in New York," where, surrounded by glass and glitz, they would find themselves in the company of American men treating them as slightly superior and American women "with flamingo legs" who took English accents to bed. Sure enough, their careers would flourish accordingly. Moving back and forth across the ocean, they would discover that in New York they possessed the panache of English aristocrats, while in London (remember, this was still the 60's) they were as rich as Yanks.

One such man, undoubtedly, was and is the power editor Harold Evans, whose own love affair with America began (as he puts it in the preface to this volume) when, as a young journalist on a scholarship, he "stepped off the steamship *Franconia* into a New York syncopating with the rhythms of the 50's." Within a decade, Evans had propelled himself into so high a journalistic orbit that he was called back to England to edit the London *Sunday Times*. There, he earned renown as a knight errant, dueling against wicked corporations and no less wicked government. Proof of his incorruptible professionalism may be found on every page of his personal memoir of that period, *Good Times, Bad Times* (1984).

In 1981, Evans's labors were rewarded with his elevation to editorship of the daily *Times*. Alas, however, the dark lord Rupert Murdoch had just purchased the Old Lady of Printing House Square with the connivance of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. Though he bravely

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resisted the resulting degradations, within a year the martyred Evans had to resign. Naturally, his trans-Atlantic stature only soared the higher.

Back in New York, after an indifferent stint in television and films and as the editor of *Condé Nast Traveler*, Evans was finally named chief editor of Random House in 1990. There he struck gold with such authors as Colin Powell and Anonymous (*Primary Colors*), but struck out with such authors as Bill Clinton and Dick Morris. In 1997, he either moved over or was pushed over to direct the media properties of his friend Mortimer Zuckerman, including *U.S. News & World Report* and the *Atlantic Monthly*.

No wonder that Evans should want to celebrate a land where, the uncharitable say, he has always failed upward. And indeed you get a lot of celebration for your money in *The American Century*: a massive coffee-table volume weighing fully five pounds; 900 magnificent photographs, accompanied, *American Heritage*-style, by explanatory boxes or captions; a sprinkling of clever statistics (patterns of alcohol consumption, patents issued, percentage of Americans who voted in 1890 vs. 1990, and the like); fetching two-page vignettes on each 20th-century President; and a running narrative of the century-long era that Evans dates from 1889 to 1989.

How much of the spade work was done by Evans himself, and how much by his two chief collaborators and twenty-odd assistants, is anyone's guess. It is a good bet, though, that the "Commentary" that opens each chapter and puts the "spin" on the history is Evans's own doing. For these passages have the unmistakable taste of a mid-Atlantic man's generic condescension, seasoned with careful obeisances to the reigning shibboleths of midtown Manhattan.

Evans begins by defining the American challenge as one of keeping lit the "flames of liberty and equality." No sooner are these unexceptionable words out of his mouth, however, than he shifts into political correctness: "I have paid consistent attention to the oppressed—to blacks, Indians, women, immigrants, and others—since they are a denial of the promise of America." Setting aside the solecism—presumably, Evans does not mean that *they* are what constitutes the denial—one may wonder: were all women and/or all immigrants always denied the promise of America? At the very least, any such notion sits radically at odds with the story Evans himself goes on to tell of turn-of-the-century immigrants, who

> expected to find their own way [in America] with the help of the network of kith, kin, and church, and sometimes the Salvation Army. . . . They learned English, they worked hard, they taught their children, they nourished their churches and synagogues, they promoted order in their communities.

This celebration of self-reliance conflicts, indeed, not only with Evans's conception of immigrants as always "oppressed" but with his praise for every big-government program of the century, from the Progressive era to the New Deal to the Great Society. In the end, one is at a loss to know which quality Evans finds more quintessentially American, individualism or the welfare mentality. To judge from the general drift of the text, it may well be the latter.

As one might expect, almost all the women who appear in these pages are feminist activists, from Susan B. Anthony and Emma Goldman to Jane Addams, Margaret Sanger, and Eleanor Roosevelt, to Gloria Steinem and Betty Friedan—and all are lionized. Minority figures are likewise either victims or heroes or both; Cesar Chavez, he of the California grape-pickers strike, is simply "The Saint." Other Evans favorites include fellow muckraking journalists and consumer-rights' advocates like Ralph Nader, "to whom America owes more than it may ever realize." Businessmen, by contrast, are either victimizers or anti-heroes or both. J.P. Morgan was a racist robber baron, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. "massacred" striking miners, and the Roaring Twenties—"Babbitt's Day"—were a time when, in the words of John Dos Passos, "Big Money" replaced "justice and freedom."

If neither the spirit of individualism nor business and technology made this the American century, what then (besides AFDC) did? The only candidate would seem to be American foreign policy, and particularly the crusades against imperialism, fascism, and Communism. But since Evans seldom places the American story in a global context, and altogether treats America's wars and foreign policy half-heartedly, the particular source of the nation's greatness in this sphere also remains, to say the least, unclear.

Thus, the Spanish-American war is summarized here as a half-baked crusade born of "moralizing, not greed"; Woodrow Wilson stands accused of "moral imperialism"; isolationism in the 1930's is described as so engulfing the nation that it included FDR, "the isolationist in the White House"; and, while Americans after Pearl Harbor are lauded for fighting to preserve "the principles of freedom and human dignity around the globe," the second longest passage in the volume is a sustained attack on the use of atomic bombs over Japan. To be sure, some of the judgments in this laundry list are accurate; but America can hardly be said to emerge from them with much more than a passing grade.

When it comes to U.S. containment of the Soviet Union, Evans, true to form, raises two cheers for the effort but immediately warns that excesses of self-righteousness led to some "dark and dangerous di-

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versions." He finds Alger Hiss and the Rosenbergs guilty, but also condemns John Foster Dulles, the CIA, and the nuclear arms race. Although he shows some sympathy for Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger's efforts to clean up the mess they inherited in Vietnam from the Best and the Brightest, the foreign policy of Ronald Reagan is virtually ignored, save for a brief mention of Reagan's relations with Gorbachev, the 1983 fiasco in Lebanon that led to the death of 241 Marines, and a long wallow in the Iran-*contra* swamp. Evans does write that the American example of spiritual and material beneficence "was the torch of freedom all the world could see"; evidently, however, he was unable to find anything America actually *did* that contributed to victory in the cold war.

In short, one would look in vain in *The American Century* for an explanation of what high characteristics, peculiar to the United States, made this an American century. The closest Evans comes is in a passage pondering how it was that American democracy survived the cataclysmic 1930's and 40's when much of Europe was succumbing to fascism, Communism, or plutocratic dictatorship. But his answer—Americans, he writes, just have an instinct for democracy, and a genius for not pressing any political theory too far—simply begs the question.

IF *The American Century* lacks historical ballast, why (aside from the prospect of sales) did Evans bother to float it? Two ulterior motives occur to me. One may have been to mount an indirect defense of Bill Clinton through the medium of an otherwise inexplicably bitter attack on Richard Nixon; for, yes, the subject of the *longest* (and most vituperative) passage in this book on the entire "American century" is . . . Watergate. Another may have been to skewer the British historian and columnist Paul Johnson, with whom Evans seems obsessed and who always appears in these pages tagged with pejorative epithets like "the laissez-faire apologist." And yet, Evans's rancor notwithstanding (he held Johnson responsible for conspiring with Murdoch to oust him from the editorship of the London *Times*), his own closing summary in *The American Century* is a virtual paraphrase of the paean to American courage and forward-looking ingenuity that ends Johnson's own *A History of the American People*.

So perhaps, in the end, this leviathan of a book is really intended to be nothing more than Evans's thank-you to a country where a young foreign journalist could arrive on a scholarship and rise to pen words like these (from *Good Times, Bad Times*):

> I was due on holiday in America. While there, I had the pleasure of reading in the [London] *Times* court page that Tina Brown [then the editor of *Vanity Fair*, later to become the editor of the *New Yorker*] and I were married on 19 August 1981 at Grey Gardens, East Hampton, Long Island, the beautiful summer home of the editor of the *Washington Post*, Ben Bradlee, and his wife, the writer Sally Quinn. With Tina's parents in Spain, the bride was given away by [London *Times* features editor] Tony Holden, who had taken a house on Martha's Vineyard with Amanda and his children. . . . The ceremony took place in the Bradlees' Italian garden, on the edge of the Atlantic, with Ben as the best man. . . .

God bless the Atlantic, O mid-Atlantic Man, for on its far shore there lies indeed the "classless" society, albeit some of its members are more classy (or classless) than others.

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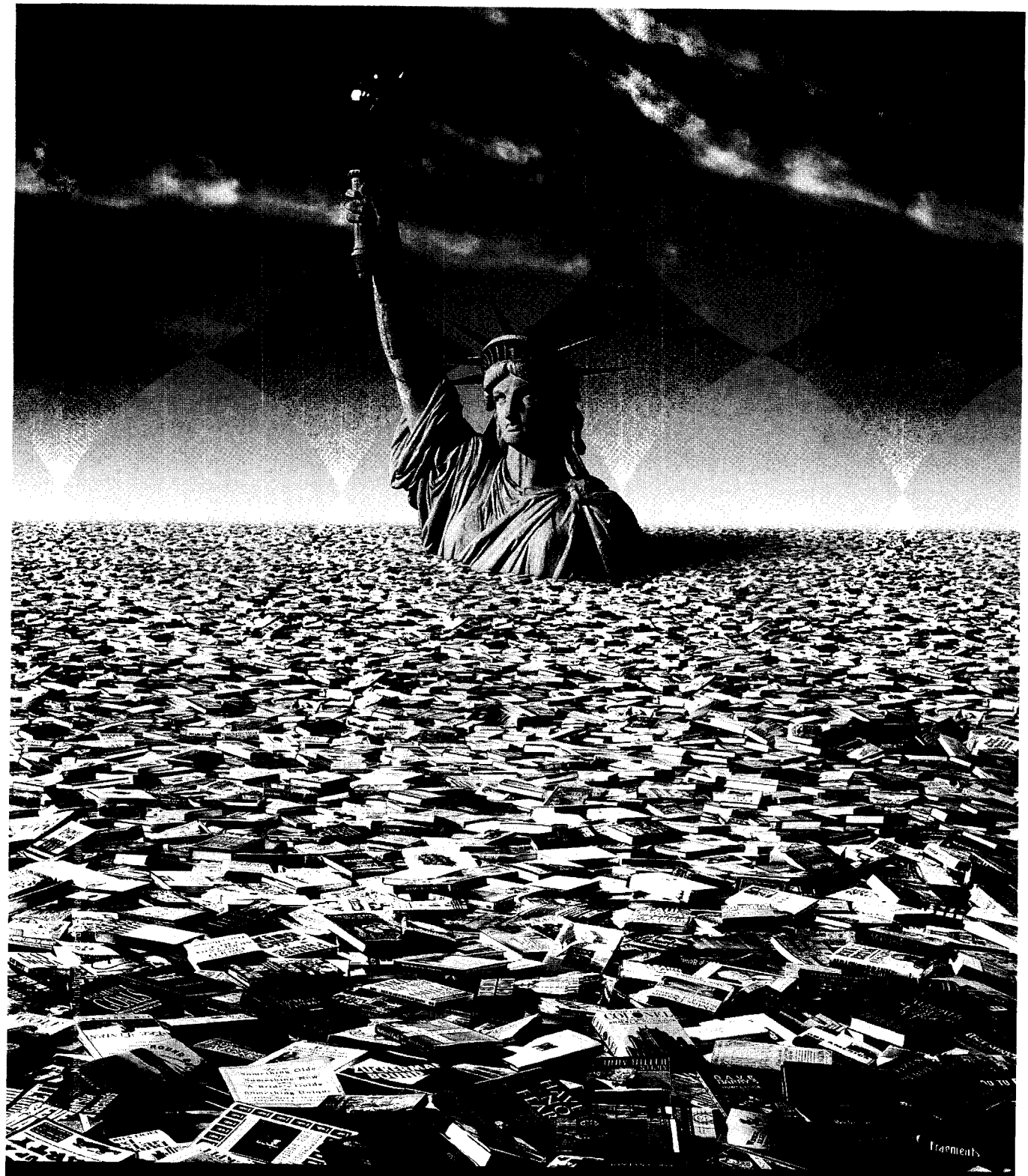

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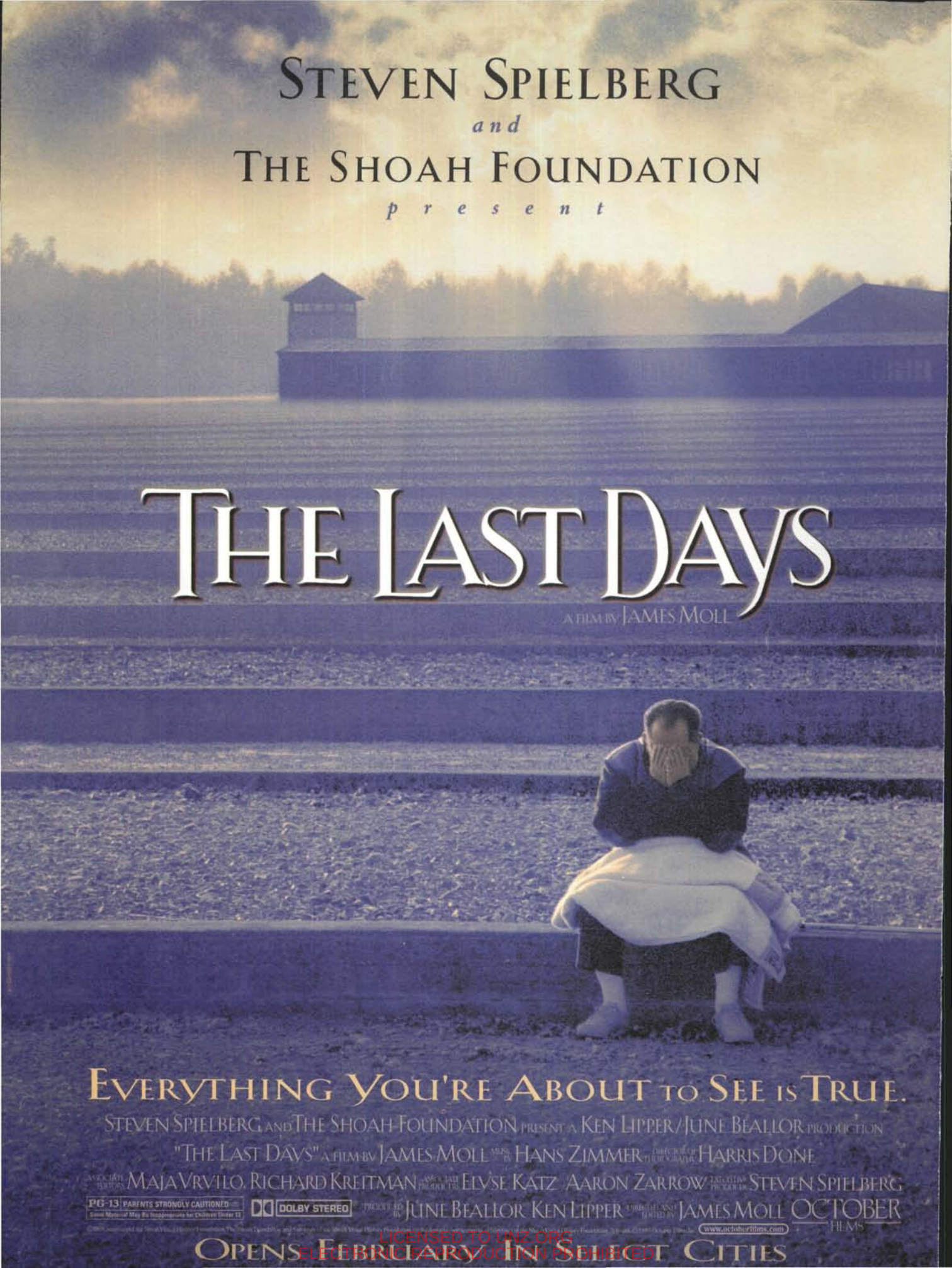
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